THE STYLE OF CARSON MCCULLERS:

REALISM AND SYMBOLISM

by

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PREFACE

A study of the literary techniques of Carson McCullers reveals her particular skill in combining the elements of realism and symbolism to produce novels of interest to the general reader as well as to a more specialized reading audience. For this study, five novels by Carson McCullers were analyzed on the basis of characterization, setting, and plot. Conclusions regarding elements of technique, devices of unity, and symbolic meaning were then weighed. The novels used for the study were: The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, Reflections in a Golden Eye, The Member of the Wedding, The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, and Clock Without Hands. In addition to the primary sources, articles of criticism from professional journals were included in the study.

I wish to thank Drs. Clinton C. Keeler and Mary Rohrberger who gave so generously of their time in directing the writing of this thesis; the Department of English for financial aid granted in a graduate assistantship, and my husband Jim for his help, encouragement, and patience.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the two hundred years' history of the novel, certain concepts of its form and function have been established so that Walter Allen, a critic and historian of the novel, can write:

> We know...what the novelist sets out to do when he writes a novel. Like any other artist the novelist is a maker. He is making an imitation, an imitation of the life of man on earth. He is making, it might be said, a working model of life as he sees and feels it, his conclusions about it being expressed in the characters he invents, the situations in which he places them, and in the very words he chooses for those purposes.[1]

The emphasis which Mr. Allen places on the novelist and his "conclusions" about life "as he sees and feels it" characterizes the freedom of expression which is found in many twentieth century novelists. As modern writers have sought variations in traditional forms to better express what they feel and interpret about life, the novel has become a more flexible instrument of man's creative genius. A multilevel purpose and interpretation of the novel is an outgrowth of such variation.

Although Carson McCullers cannot be called an innovator, her technique places her work outside the bounds of ordinary realism. She has given added dimension to her writing by combining the traditional form of realism in the novel with symbolism. Aspects of Mrs. McCullers' realism can be seen in such conventional devices as her use of common, middle class

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[1]Walter Allen, The English Novel (New York, 1954), p. xvii.

characters; plain, unadorned language; careful selection of details describing familiar settings; and action which chronicles the experiences of man's everyday living. It is the exaggeration and distortion of natural things which constitute the general form of Carson McCullers' symbolism. Her fidelity of description maintains the plausibility of her characters and their situations, but the extremes with which she works qualifies her strict adherence to realism.

Because of her style, technique, and locale, Carson McCullers has been associated in the minds of critics with a group of writers who began writing during or shortly after World War II. These writers have been variously called a "southern school," or part of a "southern renascence," or representatives of a "new American gothic." It is often within a critical survey of these groups of writers that Mrs. McCullers is discussed. In addition, however, there has been some critical work on Mrs. McCullers as an individual artist not dependent on the dictum of any particular "school." An increase of critical work on Carson McCullers in the past seven years seems to indicate a growing interest in and respect for her work. Two critics have commented on the need for more critical work on Mrs. McCullers. Oliver Evans writes:

> There is some evidence for believing that Mrs. McCullers is both a 'writer's writer' and one whose work requires, or at least lends itself to, a considerable amount of explication--more, at any rate, than the popular reviewer, either for reasons of space or because he lacks the proper literary background, is prepared to supply.[2]

Dayton Kohler, in discussing the unity and consistency of Carson McCullers' work, also comments:

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[2]Oliver Evans, "The Achievement of Carson McCullers," English Journal XL (1962), 301.

> Her novels and short stories, set beside those of her contemporaries, seem more nearly of one piece. This underlying unity is partly the result of her prevailing theme of loneliness and desire, partly the working of the special sensibility which colors her perception of people and events. Her writing has both center and substance, making all the more remarkable the fact that serious criticism has never given her fiction the attention it deserves.[3]

The unity which Mr. Kohler speaks of is one of the most striking features of Carson McCullers' work. In the five novels which comprise the basis for this study,[4] Mrs. McCullers employs regularly recurring devices of characterization, setting, theme, and plot. The characters are always either physical or mental deviates from the so-called "norm"; the setting in each novel is Southern, usually with an isolation and insularity which presents a microcosm. The recurring theme of loneliness and love is the strongest unifying force in Mrs. McCullers' work. In all her novels, the characters are seeking something to comfort their spirits which feel the inner loneliness of man. The simplicity of her plots directs the interest to her characters as they work out the elements of the theme in each novel. A special focus on characters to illustrate an idea leads naturally to symbolism. The characters

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[3]Dayton Kohler, "Carson McCullers: Variations on a Theme," English Journal, XL (1951), 415.

[4]The following novels are the primary sources for this study:

Carson McCullers, The Heart is a Lonely Hunter (New York, 1940). Hereafter indicated by page numbers inserted parenthetically in the text.

Carson McCullers, Reflections in a Golden Eye (New York, 1941). Hereafter indicated by page numbers inserted parenthetically in the text.

Carson McCullers, The Member of the Wedding (New York, 1946). Hereafter indicated by page numbers inserted parenthetically in the text.

Carson McCullers, The Ballad of the Sad Cafe (New York, 1951). Hereafter indicated by page numbers inserted parenthetically in the text.

Carson McCullers, Clock Without Hands, (New York, 1961). Hereafter indicated by page numbers inserted parenthetically in the text.

represent types, but at the same time Carson McCullers preserves their individual or personal identity. The settings are microcosms where details of rooms, a cafe, the weather, and seasons illuminate shades of meaning in character interpretation and, ultimately, in theme. Physical properties are manifestations of spiritual qualities so that details of realism function on a symbolic level. The unity of basic fiction elements within each individual novel is extended beyond the particular novels to include the whole body of Carson McCullers' work. The close, interweaving patterns of development create a special fascination and pleasure in critical analysis and comparison of Mrs. McCullers' novels.

CHAPTER II

PHYSICAL CHARACTERIZATION

In Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary Novel, Ihab Hassan sees the image of the hero in modern fiction as a "dark impulse of resistance."[1] As a part of the contemporary literary scene he cites the traditions of the southern renascense as being "more openly hostile to the popular assumptions the country entertains at large."[2] He finds this resistance particularly strong in Carson McCullers where "opposition informs the eccentric design of her form."[3] He comments further:

> Adolescents and freaks are her rueful heroes because the first are not as yet initiated and the latter are forever unacceptable; both do not belong, and in both physical incompleteness is the source of a qualitative, a spiritual difference. And lonely as her characters are, encased as they are in their dreams, most private of human expressions, their actions usually serve only to intensify their solitude.[4]

In the above observation Mr. Hassan illuminates the three major devices which Carson McCullers uses to create characters who function on both realistic and symbolic levels: external characteristics; internal or spiritual characteristics; and symbolic action. Dayton Kohler also notes the dual function of the characters when he writes:

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[1] Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton, 1961), p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 205.

[3] Ibid., p. 205.

[4] Ibid., p. 208

> Apparently Mrs. McCullers can realize her own tragic vision of life only through symbols of the misshapen and the hurt, whose physical deformities reveal outwardly the twisted, distorted spirits of their inner lives.[5]

The physical and spiritual relationships of the characters to each other provide still another means of character delineation. Horace Taylor observed this relationship in Reflections in a Golden Eye, but it is a device used in all of Mrs. McCullers' novels.

> Each of these people is a kind of universe unto himself, but incomplete to the extent that he needs another person to express himself to, a mirror to reflect against.[6]

External characteristics such as those found in grotesques (deaf-mutes, Amazons, dwarfs), in adolescents, in mental and emotional deviates, in physical differences such as different colored eyes, or in diseases such as tuberculosis or leukemia dominate the features of Carson McCullers' characters. In each case, the external devices of characterization are used to symbolize a spiritual quality of the character. The intricate mirroring of characters, the motions of their relationships in either centripetal or convoluting patterns offer the reader a special fascination of their own.

The symbolic function of Carson McCullers' grotesques is given fuller expression by a restricted number of characters in each novel. Mrs. McCullers uses from three to six characters in each book and the intricacy of their relationships suggests a musical ensemble. There is usually one pivotal character around whom the others function. He carries the burden of the

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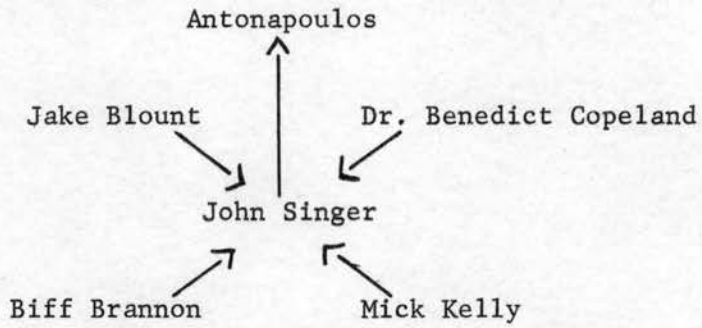
[5] Kohler, op. cit., p. 417.

[6] Horace Taylor, "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter: A Southern Waste Land," Studies in American Literature, ed. Waldo McNeir and Leo B. Levy (Baton Rouge, 1960), p. 158.

theme, and from him the others echo or create their own melodies. Sometimes they harmonize, but oftentimes their songs blend in a minor key or end on a dissonant note.

Carson McCullers' first novel, The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, contains most of the structural patterns, the devices of characterization, and themes which appear in variations throughout her other four novels. The close interrelationships of the characters is demonstrated in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter by John Singer, the thirty-two year old deaf-mute, and the other characters' relations to him. John Singer's silence bears out the theme of loneliness and incommunication of the human spirit, and it is against his silence that the other characters advance their individual themes. The pattern of their relationships is illustrated in the graph below:



The graph illustrates that as Mick Kelly, Jake Blount, Dr. Benedict Copeland, and Biff Brannon turn to Singer for fullest expression of their innermost thoughts, the deaf-mute, unable to communicate in return, listens unfailingly to their words. For Singer, there is only one outlet for his own broodings and that is in his friend, the feebleminded Greek, Antonapoulos, also a deaf-mute.

As the pivotal character to whom all the other are drawn, the magnetism of the deaf-mute must be explained in terms of his external features.

Because Singer is unable to communicate with his associates they are able to read whatever meaning they wish into the expressions of his external features. John Singer's greatest magnetism seems to lie in the uncanny expression of wisdom in his face. "In his face /was/ a brooding peace that is seen most often in the faces of the very sorrowful or the very wise." (p. 9) To Jake, "It was like the face of a friend he had known for a long time." (p. 52) In it Dr. Copeland saw, "...something gentle and Jewish, the knowledge of one who belongs to a race that is oppressed." (p. 114)

Singer's eyes seemed the most responsive part of his face. "His eyes made a person think that he heard things nobody else had ever heard, that he knew things no one had ever guessed before. He did not seem quite human." (p. 20)

A deaf-mute's hands are his tools of communication, so it is not surprising that they were a marked physical characteristic of John Singer. With the loss of his friend, they became cumbersome appendages.

> His hands were a torment to him. They would not rest. They twitched in his sleep, and sometimes he awoke to find them shaping the words in his dreams before his face. He did not like to look at his hands or to think about them. They were slender and brown and very strong. In the years before he had always tended them with care. In the winter he used oil to prevent chapping, and he kept the cuticles pushed down and nails always filed to the shape of his fingertips. He had loved to wash and tend his hands. But now he only scrubbed them roughly with a brush two times a day and stuffed them back into his pockets. (p. 175)

As Singer acted as the center of a centripetal force for the other characters, there was yet one to whom he turned. Antonapoulos, the deaf-mute Greek is drawn in direct contrast to Singer. He is gluttonous, obese, feebleminded, vain, and overbearing. The effectiveness of the contrast in their natures comes as a shock to the reader when he realizes

that Antonapoulos, with all his vulgarity and obscenity has the same meaning (actually, more meaning) for Singer as Singer's gentleness and wisdom have for the four characters who turn to him. In the vacant smile and the tearful, oily eyes of his friend, Singer saw profound wisdom and understanding.

In relation to the other characters in the novel, Biff Brannon holds a unique position of both actor and observer. From his station behind the counter he observes and evaluates objectively the characters and the action they generate in his cafe. His fascination with freaks perhaps conditions his close observations which detect "private attributes" of people. He was observing Blount: "He would not take his hand away from his mouth, and it was as though his lips were some very secret part of himself which was being exposed." (p. 23)

> Biff noticed this. He was thinking that in nearly every person there was some special physical part always kept guarded. With the mute his hands. The kid Mick picked at the front of her blouse to keep the cloth from rubbing the new, tender nipples beginning to come out on her breast. With Alice it was her hair...And with himself? (pp. 23, 24)

With Biff, it was his genitals. His masculinity is attested in his description as "...a hard man of middle height, with a beard so dark and heavy that the lower part of his face looked as though it were molded of iron." (p. 9) But Biff was impotent; at least he had lost any normal sexual desire and he recognized in himself a duality in his sexual make-up. Biff theorized that bisexuality was common to everyone:

> By nature all people are of both sexes. So that marriage and the bed is not all by any means. The proof? Real youth and old age. Because often old men's voices grow high and reedy and they take on a mincing walk. And old women sometimes grow fat and their voices get rough and deep and they grow dark little mustaches. And he even proved it himself--the part of him that sometimes almost wished he was a mother and that Mick and Baby were his kids. (pp. 112, 113)

The complexity of Biff's sexual position is marked in several ways; he sews, he uses some of his wife's cosmetics, and he wants to mother a child. Oedipus tendencies are also suggested in his wearing his mother's wedding ring on his little finger. After each reference to his impotency he nervously twists the wedding ring. Additional guilt feelings are shown in the fact that he bathes only from the waist up, except about twice a year.

As Biff watches Mick Kelly grow into young womanhood, he finds a center on which to base his theory of bisexuality and also a child on whom to center his love. Mick was a "gangling, towheaded youngster, a girl of about twelve. She was dressed in khaki shorts, a blue shirt, and tennis shoes--so that at first glance she was like a very young boy." (p. 14) She had a "hoarse, boyish voice" and a habit of "hitching up her khaki shorts and swaggering like a cowboy in the picture show." (p. 17) The characteristics of adolescence common to Mick emphasize a metamorphosis both spiritual and physical. She is the embodiment of all the seekers in the world, but especially of the young.

The two remaining figures of the quartet grouped around John Singer are Jake Blount and Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland. Each of them is crippled by his radicalism; for Jake the social resistance he faces with his Fascism and Communism is compounded with the added frustration of his own temperament; for Copeland, the injustice he meets as a Negro in the South is combined with the unconscious resistance he meets in the nature of his people as he seeks for them the idealization of his dream.

Biff Brannon, with his typical observation of the people in his restaurant notes of Blount:

> The man was short, with heavy shoulders like beams. He had a small, ragged mustache, and beneath this his lower lip looked as though it had been stung by a wasp. There were many things about the fellow that seemed contrary. His head was very large and well-shaped, but his neck was soft and slender as a boy's. The mustache looked false, as if it had been stuck on for a costume party and would fall off if he talked too fast. It made him seem almost middle-aged, although his face with its high smooth forehead and wide-open eyes was young. His hands were huge, stained, and calloused, and he was dressed in a cheap white-linen suit. There was something very funny about the man, yet at the same time another feeling would not let you laugh. (p. 12)

The peculiar disjointure of his physical appearance reflects, of course, the emotional instability of his nature. It is further remarked:

> Blount was not a freak, although when you first saw him he gave you that impression. It was like something was deformed about him--but when you looked at him closely each part of him was normal and as it ought to be. Therefore if this difference was not in the body it was probably in the mind. (pp. 16, 17)

The total impression of Blount is one of drunken animalistic urgency untempered with mental resolution. Words gushed like a cataract from his throat and, as Biff noted, his lips seemed to characterize his whole face. His bestiality is highlighted once in contemplating a coming meal with Singer. "When he spoke of food his face was fierce with gusto. With each word he raised his upper lip like a ravenous animal." (p. 133)

His eyes, however, seemed to belong to a man apart. They "...did not share the violence of the rest of him. Wide gazing beneath his massive scowling forehead, they had a withdrawn and distracted appearance." (p. 130) Dr. Copeland, meeting Jake unexpectedly on a stairway, "...with sudden clinical interest observed the white man's face, for in his eyes he saw a strange, fixed, and withdrawn look of madness." (p. 126)

The word darkness is used repeatedly in relation to Dr. Copeland, for this is the characteristic of both his physical and emotional world.

To a gentle rebuke from his daughter to turn on the lights in his meagerly furnished house, he replies, "The dark suits me." (p. 61) Dr. Copeland is introduced to the reader in his kitchen:

> The red glow from the chinks of the stove shone on his face--in this light his heavy lips looked almost purple against his black skin, and his gray hair, tight against his skull like a cap of lamb's wool, took on a bluish color also. He sat motionless in this position for a long time. Then he cleared his throat harshly.../and/ read Spinoza. (p. 60)

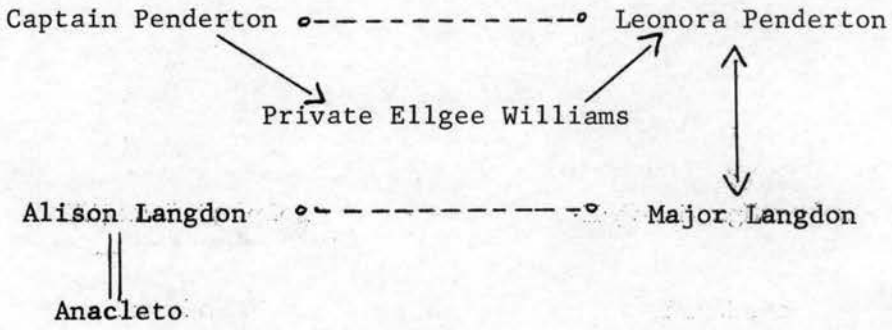
Dr. Copeland has tuberculosis and he carries with him small pieces of white paper into which he spits and afterwards burns. His diseased lungs are representative of the "evil blackness" in his spirit. "The hopeless suffering of his people made in him a madness, a wild and evil feeling of destruction...He wrestled in his spirit and fought down the evil blackness." (p. 122)

Reflections in a Golden Eye is an intricate patterning of contrasts and reflections of a bizarre array of characters whose "freakishness" rests in mental and emotional abnormalities rather than outward physical defects. Private Ellgee Williams has "the strange rapt face of a Gaugin primitive" (p. 39), and as the pivotal character for the action his primitivism establishes the basis for the comparisons and contrasts essential to the novel. This basis lies in the opposition of sensual primitivism to sensitivity and intellectualism. Frank Bladanza has used the terms animalism and spiritualistic love to describe the symbolic reference of the characters' actions in Reflections in a Golden Eye. On the basis of animalism and spiritualism he has summarized the interrelations of the characters in the following way:

> Captain Penderton and his neighbor's wife, Mrs. Langdon, are sensitive, intelligent psychotics plagued by the animalistic drives of both their spouses, Mrs. Penderton

> and Major Langdon, who have long been lovers. The excessive intelligence of the first pair is balanced on one side by Anacleto, the balletomane Filipino house boy of the Langdons, and on the other hand, the avowedly feebleminded tendencies in the second pair are balanced by Private Ellgee Williams, who is an even more crystal-pure idiot than Faulkner's Popeye. The balance is perfect when we observe that Mrs. Langdon is very profoundly devoted to Anacleto, while the Captain pursues Private Williams with an obsessive and confused mania.[7]

These complex relationships may be more clearly illustrated in the graph below. The broken lines represent antitheses in character relationships; solid lines indicate character syntheses on either a physical or spiritual basis.



The character of the "crystal-pure idiot," Williams, is delineated almost entirely by direct exposition. The animal allusions used in describing his physical characteristics emphasize his primitivism and his symbolic reference.

> Private Williams was a silent young soldier and in the barracks he had neither an enemy nor a friend. His round sunburned face was marked by a certain watchful innocence. His full lips were red and the bangs of his hair lay brown and matted on his forehead. In his eyes, which were of a curious blend of amber and brown, there was a mute expression that is found usually in the eyes of animals. At first glance Private Williams

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[7]Frank Baldanza, "Plato in Dixie," Georgia Review, XII (1958), 158.

> seemed a bit heavy and awkward in his bearing. But this was a deceptive impression; he moved with the silence and agility of a wild creature or a thief.... His hands were small, delicately boned and very strong. (p. 2)

Private Williams had never been known "to laugh, to become angry, or to suffer in any way." (p. 2) There were times, however, when he did have "a look of suddenly awakened happiness on his face." These were the times when the young soldier took a horse from the stables to a flat open space deep in the woods.

> In this lonely place the soldier always unsaddled the horse and let him go free. Then he took off his clothes and lay down on a large flat rock in the middle of the field. For there was one thing this soldier could not do without--the sun. Even on the coldest days he would lie still and naked and let the sunlight soak into his flesh. Sometimes, still naked, he stood on the rock and slipped upon the horse's bare back. His horse was an ordinary army plug which, with anyone but Private Williams could sustain only two gaits--a clumsy trot and a rocking-horse gallop. But with the soldier a marvelous change came over the animal; he cantered or single-footed with proud, stiff elegance. The soldier's body was a pale golden brown and he held himself erect. Without his clothes he was so slim that the pure, curved outlines of his ribs could be seen. As he cantered about in the sunlight, there was a sensual, savage smile on his lips that would have surprised his barrack mates. After such outings he came back weary to the stables and spoke to no one. (pp. 46, 47)

Williams' outward animal passivity mirrors his mental condition. He is childlike, and even less than childlike. His mind registers impressions only at the deepest level of his consciousness.

> He felt, but did not think; he experienced without making any mental resume of his present or past actions....The mind is like a richly woven tapestry in which the colors are distilled from the experiences of the senses, the design drawn from the convolutions of the intellect. The mind of Private Williams was imbued with various colors of strange tones, but it was without delineation, void of form. (p. 79)

In direct contrast to Williams is Anacleto, the sprite-like Filipino houseboy of Alison Langdon. As Oliver Evans has noted, Anacleto is the Ariel to Williams' Caliban.[8] Neither of them is quite human, yet their existence cannot be doubted.

In many ways, Anacleto is an extension of his mistress, Alison Langdon. "Their voices and enunciation were so precisely alike that they seemed to be softly echoing each other. The only difference was that Anacleto spoke in a chattering breathless manner, while Alison's voice was measured and composed." (p. 35) When Alison took medicine, Anacleto made a face for her.

As an extension of his mistress's personality, a dual contrast is established between Anacleto and Allison's husband, Major Langdon. Langdon is a solid, unimaginative officer who is having an affair with Leonora Penderson. The relationship between these three characters is established in the scene which introduces Anacleto.

> The little Filipino walked with grace and composure. He was dressed in sandals, soft gray trousers, and a blouse of aquamarine linen. His flat little face was creamy white and his black eyes glowed. He did not appear to notice the Major--but when he reached the bottom of the stairs he slowly raised his right leg, with the toes flexed like a ballet dancer's and gave an airy little skip. (p. 32)

The Major, with his "hairy fist" on his hips watched Anacleto as he artistically prepared a dainty tray for Alison. His scorn was withering, but Anacleto remained unscathed.

> It was common knowledge that he thought the Lord had blundered grossly in the making of everyone except

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[8] Evans, op. cit., p. 303.

> himself and Madame Alison--the sole exceptions to this were people behind footlights, midgets, great artists, and such-like fabulous folk. (p. 33)

Anacleto's fascination with freaks, his bizarre costumes, his experimental ventures with French, and particularly his dainty, imitative mannerisms elevate his personality so that he seems to exist on a nearly spherical level. Anacleto's sensitivity registers every gesture and sound around him, but he is capable only of reflecting this sensitivity; rational judgment and action are denied him.

The woman mirrored by Anacleto is Alison Langdon, "a small, dark, fragile woman with a large nose and sensitive mouth." Alison has been ill for a long time and she wears an "on-the-defensive expression that is often seen in the eyes of persons who have been ill for a long time and dependent upon the thoughtfulness, or negligence, of others." (p. 27)

Alison's inability to adjust to her husband's insensitivity, her feeling of sexual inadequacy, and a despondency over the loss of her child, push Alison to the verge of lunacy. Always sickly herself, Alison had given birth to a deformed child, Caroline, who died in infancy. In a symbolic act of rejection for her sexual capacity and of an increasing death-wish, Alison cut off the nipples of her breasts with the gardening shears. Following this act her heart disease worsened, her sensitivity increased, and her awareness of all the characters' relationships hardened with cold reality.

> It seemed to her that she loathed people. Everyone she had known for the past five years was somehow wrong.... Morris Langdon in his blunt way was as stupid and heartless as a man could be. Leonora was nothing but an animal. And thieving Weldon Penderton was at bottom hopelessly corrupt. What a gang! Even she herself she loathed. (p. 68)

Leonora Penderton was nothing but an animal; but where Ellgee Williams was a dumb, passive animal, she was spirited and sensual. Each detail of her physical make-up is sensual. Her face has a "bemused placidity," her laugh is "soft and savage," her face is rosy, and "little glistening sweat beads" rest on her upper lip. An undefined craving germinates deep within Williams when he first sees Leonora nude before her fireplace.

"Leonora Penderton feared neither man, beast, nor the devil; God she had never known." A kind of amorality surrounding Leonora was combined with her feeblemindedness. Although she was a popular hostess on the army post, "there was something about her that puzzled her friends and acquaintances. They sensed an element in her personality that they could not quite put their fingers on. The truth of the matter was that she was a little feebleminded." (p. 14)

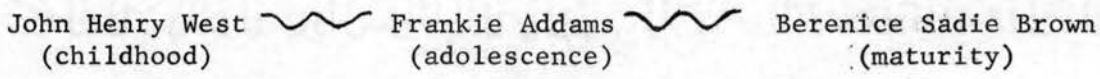
Leonora's character is best demonstrated by the relationship she has with her horse, Firebird. She is an excellent horsewoman and she and the beautiful horse seem to be of the same spirit. Leonora is able to control the animal without breaking it; by contrast, her husband is a cowardly horseman and insists on breaking the horse's spirit in a search for his own identity.

The most complex character in Reflections in a Golden Eye is Captain Weldon Penderton; he is a homosexual, a cleptomaniac, and he is given to heavy use of sleeping drugs. The irony of the contrast between his wife's sensuality and his own impotence is increased by his penchant for his wife's lovers and later by his passion for Private Williams. Penderton is not an insensitive man, nor is he stupid. He is intelligent, but he is cowardly and he searches for a new identity in the carefree cameradery which he thinks exists among the enlisted men.

There is a lack of explicitness in developing the Captain's physical characteristics. His sexual ambivalence is probably the most significant factor of his character in that it is responsible for the cowardice which forever denies him the resolution he needs for meaning in his life. "Sexually the Captain obtained within himself a delicate balance between the male and female elements, with the susceptibilities of both and the active powers of neither." (p. 8)

In comparison to Mrs. McCullers' other novels, the characters in Reflections in a Golden Eye have less physical grotesqueness, but their mental and emotional defects are more extreme. The severe objectivity and lack of sympathy with which Mrs. McCullers treats these characters leads a reader to agree with Alison Langdon's comment about them all: "What a gang!" (p. 68)

The complex character relationships seen in the two earlier novels are simplified in The Member of the Wedding by a reduction in the number of characters used, and by simpler physical and symbolic relationships between the three main characters. Carson McCullers characterizes this relationship in terms of a musical analogy. She writes that, "John Henry sang in a high wailing voice...Berenice's voice was dark and definite and deep...the old Frankie sang up and down in the middle space between John Henry and Berenice..." Frankie's simple movement up and down, or back and forth, between John Henry and Berenice can be graphically illustrated in this way:



Frankie Addams is the adolescent girl caught between the two worlds of childhood and maturity--the two worlds represented here by John Henry West, her six year old first cousin, and Berenice Sadie Brown, the Negro

cook who had been in the Addams home since Frankie's birth. Outwardly, Frankie is like any other twelve-year-old. Like Mick, she appears bisexual. She wears shorts, a BVD undervest, goes barefoot, and wears her hair in a growing-out crewcut. And she is tall.

> This August she was twelve and five-sixths years old. She was five feet and three quarter inches tall, and she wore a number seven shoe. In the past year she had grown four inches, or at least that was what she judged. Already the hateful little summer kids hollered to her: 'Is it cold up there?' And the comments of grown people made Frankie shrivel on her heels. If she reached her height on her eighteenth birthday, she had five and one-sixth growing years ahead of her. Therefore, according to mathematics and unless she could somehow stop herself, she would grow to be over nine feet tall. And what would be a lady who is over nine feet high? She would be a Freak. (pp. 16, 17)

Frankie's fear of freakishness is a characteristic inherent not only to the pain of her adolescence, but it is also the embodiment of the theme of the novel. Freakishness implies isolation from the world, and it is a knowledge of meaning of life and place in the world which Frankie most arduously seeks.

A comparison between Frankie and Mick in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is inevitable. Their similarities are so striking as to suggest the same character appearing in different situations; in this instance, Frankie is a younger Mick; Mick early in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter might be Frankie the autumn after the wedding. The following similarities, however trivial they may appear, indicate the close characterization of the two girls: their names are both masculine in form; their fathers are both watch-makers; the relationships within their families are strained, but each girl has a momentary glimpse of understanding for her father; rooms in both their homes have been rented to strangers. More significant correspondences are seen in the symbolic elements of their search for identity, their need to belong, their sexual initiation, and the crisis in their lives which perpetrates an increasing maturity.

By the same comparison with earlier characters, Berenice may be an older and wiser Portia, Dr. Copeland's daughter who was the Kelly's cook. Portia "talks from /her/ heart" and, like Faulkner's Dilsey, she endures. Berenice, as she tells her stories of love and life, has the same quality of endurance.

> /Berenice/ was very black and broad-shouldered and short. She always said that she was thirty-five years old, but she had been saying that at least three years. Her hair was parted, plaited, and greased close to the skull, and she had a flat and quiet face. There was only one thing wrong about Berenice--her left eye was bright blue glass. It stared out fixed and wild from her quiet colored face, and why she had wanted a blue eye nobody human would every know. Her right eye was dark and sad. (p. 3)

The characters in The Member of the Wedding do not have the same degree of abnormalities in their physical make-up as in Mrs. McCullers' other novels, but they are not lacking in symbolic features. With Frankie it is merely her adolescence; with John Henry his yet unformed nature; and with Berenice it is her one blue eye. For all her wisdom and experience, Berenice is unable ever to fully apply her knowledge to her own life. In her unsuccessful attempts to recreate a dead love, it is as if another eye, one outside her own knowledge, were guiding her actions.

John Henry West is a sickly child and his death, even though it comes very suddenly at the end of the book, is not surprising.

> His chest was white and wet and naked, and he wore around his neck a tiny lead donkey tied by a string... he had the largest knees that Frankie had ever seen, and on one of them there was always a scab or a bandage where he had fallen down and skinned himself. John Henry had a little screwed white face and he wore tiny gold-rimmed glasses. (p. 3)

John Henry's voice is more insistent than any physical action he generates in the novel. Whether high pitched and piping or in a soft whisper, his remarks are like little echoes. In the musical analogy Mrs. McCullers draws he might be used as a minor theme, subdued but

insistent and recurring over and again. An example of this is found in a scene in which Berenice is warning Frankie of the folly of her attachment to the wedding.

> /Berenice says/ 'I can see through them two gray eyes of yours like they was glass. And what I see is the saddest piece of foolishness I ever knew.'
> 'Gray eyes is glass,' John Henry whispered...
> /Frankie argues/
> 'I see through them eyes,' said Berenice. 'Don't argue with me.'
> John Henry said again, but softer: 'Gray eyes is glass.'
> /Frankie continues to protest/
> 'I am just trying to head this off,' said Berenice. 'But I see it is no use.'
> John Henry whispered for the last time: 'Gray eyes is glass.' (pp. 102, 103)

Another example of this same device is seen. Frankie says:

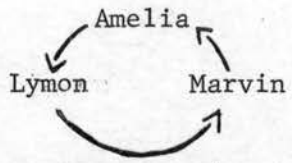
> 'I don't know what to do. I just wish I would die.'
> 'Well, die then!' said Berenice.
> And: 'Die,' John Henry echoed in a whisper.
> The world stopped.
> 'Go home,' said Frankie to John Henry.
> He stood with his big knees locked, his dirty little hand on the edge of the white table, and he did not move. (p. 19)

Along with Frankie, John Henry also embodies the themes of freakishness and bisexuality. When he and Frankie attended the Freak House at the fair he was repulsed by none of them, but instead was fascinated by the Pin Head and stayed near that booth all afternoon. Not yet inhibited by the male role which society would demand, John Henry still delighted in shuffling around in Berenice's high heeled shoes, in playing with Frankie's castaway dolls, and in wearing an old yellow jonquil costume of Frankie's. The bisexuality of his nature is particularly stressed when the three of them would sit around the kitchen table and play God and rearrange the world to suit themselves.

> John Henry West would very likely...think that people ought to be half boy and half girl, and when the old Frankie threatened to take him to the Fair and sell him to the Freak Pavilion, he would only close his eyes and smile. (p. 92)

The characters in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe are the most extreme forms of the grotesque which appear in Carson McCullers' novels. The triumph of these extremes is expressed by Dayton Kohler when he writes that Carson McCullers "...has made Miss Amelia grotesque without letting her become ridiculous, just as Cousin Lymon is sinister without being melodramatic."[9]

As in previous works, the relationships of the characters assume a circular pattern, each one loving, yet each love spurned in favor of another. The pattern may be charted in this way:



Amelia and Lymon are grotesques of extremes and opposites. Amelia is a large, strong woman who scorns the feminine role. Lymon is a dwarf, a hunchback, and a homosexual. It is through their relationship that Mrs. McCullers makes her most direct and effective statement on the nature of love:

> Now, the beloved can also be of any description. The most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love. A man may be a doddering great-grandfather and still love only a strange girl he saw in the streets of Cheehaw one afternoon two decades past. The preacher may love a fallen woman. The beloved may be treacherous, greasy-headed, and given to evil habits. Yes, and the lover may see this as clearly as anyone else--but that does not affect the evolution of his love one whit. A most mediocre person can be the object of a love which is wild, extravagant, and beautiful as the poison lilies of the swamp. A good man may be the stimulus for a love both violent and debased, or a jabbering madman may bring about in the soul of someone a tender and simple idyll. Therefore, the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself. (pp. 26, 27)

Miss Amelia's masculinity and strength are emphasized through direct description of her outward appearance and through her delight in doing a man's work.

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[9]Kohler, op. cit., p. 419.

> /Miss Amelia/ was a dark, tall woman with bones and muscles like a man. Her hair was cut short and brushed back from the forehead, and there was about her sunburned face a tense, haggard quality. She might have been a handsome woman if, even then, she was not slightly cross-eyed. There were those who would have courted her, but Miss Amelia cared nothing for the love of men and was a solitary person. (p. 4)

She thrived on lawsuits and was a shrewd businesswoman. In addition to running her store, she owned property, ran a good whiskey still, and doctored sick people with hundred of secret cures she concocted herself. With one exception:

> If a patient came with a female complaint she could do nothing. Indeed at the mere mention of the words her face would slowly darken with shame, and she would stand there craning her neck against the collar of her shirt, or rubbing her swamp boots together, for all the world like a great, shamed, dumb-tongued child. (p. 17)

Cousin Lymon's first appearance at Miss Amelia's store was marked by his extraordinary appearance:

> He was scarcely more than four feet tall and he wore a ragged, dusty coat that reached only to his knees. His crooked little legs seemed too thin to carry the weight of his great warped chest and the hump that sat on his shoulders. He had a very large head, with deep-set blue eyes and a sharp little mouth. His face was both soft and sassy--at the moment his pale skin was yellowed by dust and there were lavendar shadows beneath his eyes. (pp. 6, 7)

But love changes people, externally as well as internally. Soon after Cousin Lymon's arrival in town it was remarked:

> Where Miss Amelia stood, the light from the chinks of the stove cast a glow, so that her brown, long face was somewhat brightened. She seemed to be looking inward. There was in her expression pain, perplexity, and uncertain joy. Her lips were not so firmly set as usual, and she swallowed often. Her skin had paled and her large empty hands were sweating. Her look that night, then, was the lonesome look of the lover. (p. 23)

Her love and attention had brought about some external changes in Lymon, too. He was clean beyond words, his ragged coat was neatly mended, and Amelia had made him a new shirt from one of her own.

> He did not wear trousers such as ordinary men are meant to wear, but a pair of tight-fitting little knee-length breeches. On his skinny legs he wore black stockings, and his shoes were of a special kind, being queerly shaped, laced up over the ankles, and newly cleaned and polished with wax. Around his neck, so that his large, pale ears were almost completely covered, he wore a shawl of lime-green wool, the fringes of which almost touched the floor. (p. 18)

Such a rare sight would naturally draw attention, but Lymon possessed as well "an instinct to establish immediate and vital contact between himself and all things in the world." (p. 20)

The antagonist in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is Marvin Macy, "... a tall man with brown curly hair, and slow-moving, deep-blue eyes. His lips were red and he smiled the lazy, half-mouthed smile of the braggart." (p. 47) Marvin was a handsome man who had a choice of several young girls who were "clean-haired and soft-eyed, with tender sweet buttocks and charming ways," (p. 28) but it was "that solitary, gangling, queer-eyed girl" (p. 28) he longed for. And for her he changed his evil ways and became a respectable citizen of the town. But ten disastrous days of marriage found his love rejected and his criminal nature exposed.

After Miss Amelia's bloom of love, the greatest change in her character occurs when Lymon rejects her in preference for Marvin. In the opening paragraphs her face is described--"a face like the terrible dim faces known in dreams--sexless and white, with two gray crossed eyes which are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief." (pp. 3, 4) Irving Malin refers to this inward turning as evidence of narcissism which he includes as a characteristic of the "New American Gothic." For Malin, the grotesques are those who "love themselves so much that they cannot enter the social world except to dominate their neighbors."[10] Certainly after Lymon's departure Amelia

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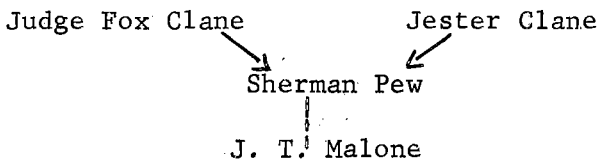
[10]Irving Malin, New American Gothic (Carbondale, 1962), p. 6.

alienated herself from society. Eventually the store was closed and her house was on the verge of collapse. She never came out. The people saw her change:

> Miss Amelia let her hair grow ragged, and it was turning gray. Her face lengthened, and the great muscles of her body shrank until she was thin as old maids are thin when they go crazy. And those gray eyes--slowly day by day they were more crossed, and it was as though they sought each other out to exchange a little glance of grief and lonely recognition. She was not pleasant to listen to; her tongue had sharpened terrible. (p. 70)

In her last novel, Clock Without Hands, the search for spiritual love is superseded as the characters seek their identification in the external world. As in former instances, the characters seem to focus and find their identity through one person; this time a blue-eyed Negro orphan named Sherman Pew. As Judge Clane's "genuine amanuensis" Sherman gives the old man a renewed feeling of importance in the world; for Jester Clane, Sherman stimulates passions and formulates ideals which might have lain dormant for years. Sherman's effect on J. T. Malone is for a long time a negative one because of the mistrust and general dislike that lay between them. But finally, it is by refusing to bomb Sherman's house that Malone is able to restore his faith in himself and life. The relationship of the characters to Sherman is charted below; the broken line indicates a negative relationship.



Of all Carson McCullers' characters the emotional make-up of Sherman Pew is one of the most complex. He suffers the persecutions of his race, his adolescence, of orphanage and the frustrations of a thwarted intellect, of racial ambivalence, and sexual molestation.

Seen by J. T. Malone, Sherman seemed to have an "unnatural appearance."

> The boy was medium sized with a muscular body and a face that was sullen in repose. Except for his eyes, he looked like any other colored boy. But his eyes were bluish-gray, and set in the dark face they had a bleak, violent look. Once those eyes were seen, the rest of the body seemed also unusual and out of proportion. The arms were too long, the chest too broad--and the expression alternated from emotional sensitivity to deliberate sullenness. (p. 10)

Sherman's blue eyes led to the seeming disproportion of the rest of his body. These eyes were a constant agitation; they marked him as an outsider to both races, and they were a constant reminder of Sherman's unknown origins. The effect of his eyes on Malone is notable:

> The eyes of both were of the same gray-blue and at first it seemed a contest to outstare each other. The eyes that looked at him were cold and blazing in the dark face--then it seemed to Malone that the blaze flickered and steadied to a look of eerie understanding. He felt that those strange eyes knew that he was soon to die. (p. 10)

Sherman is a boy of exceptional intellect and musical talent, but his emotional instability cannot control either of them. He is a psychopathic liar, but it is because, as he explains to Jester, it is his only way to make unbearable things bearable.

On his eleventh birthday his foster-father, Mr. Stevens, sexually assaulted him and for a long time afterward Sherman stuttered. In relating the story to Jester, Sherman relapses into the stutter.

Jester Clane is Sherman's whipping boy. All the spite and hate he has in the world he takes out on Jester in verbal abuse and insult. Jester is dimly aware of this, yet he does not seek to alter it. "For Jester knew dimly that fury is unleashed more freely against those you are most close to...so close that there is the trust that anger and ugliness will be forgiven." (p. 122)

> /Jester/ was a slight limber boy of seventeen with auburn hair and a complexion so fair that the freckles on his upturned nose were like cinnamon sprinkled over cream.

> The glare brightened his red hair but his face was shadowed and he shielded his wine-brown eyes against the glare. He wore blue jeans and a striped jersey, the sleeves of which were pushed back to his delicate elbows. (p. 19)

Jester was a delicate, sensitive adolescent seeking his place in the world and it is through Sherman Pew that he finds his place as a defender of justice for all races.

Oliver Evans sees J. T. Malone, a leukemia victim, as Everyman. He sees him "...with Everyman's faults but also with his dignity and capacity for the moral life. And of course the shadow of his impending death is the same shadow under which all men labor. To this extent we are all watching a 'clock without hands.'"[11] Malone is burdened with the ordinariness of his life, and now, at its close, he seeks his life's meaning.

Leukemia had given Malone a ghostly pallor; he had lost weight steadily. "His temples were shrunken so that the veins pulsed visibly when he chewed or swallowed and his Adam's apple struggled in his thin neck." (p. 1) As his physical condition weakened, his sensory perceptions strengthened and he had little control of the vividness they produced. In a conversation with the Judge, the Judge said, "When my beloved wife died I was so miserable I began digging my grave with my teeth." (p. 53)

> Malone shuddered, having an instant, vivid image of his friend chewing gritty dirt in the graveyard, crying with misery. His own illness had left him defenseless against such sudden, random images, no matter how repellent. (p. 53)

Malone's behavior becomes increasingly violent and unpredictable; he quarrels with his wife, insults customers at his drugstore, makes unreasonable demands on merchants, and begins to take very good care of his body. He has suits custom made and has extensive dental work done. These are all outward indications of his spiritual unwillingness to die and in preparing his physical body he hopes to prepare his soul.

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[11] Evans, op. cit., p. 308.

Judge Fox Clane, a former senator from Georgia, was 'the first citizen of Milan,' and 'one of the fixed stars in that glorious firmament of Southern statesmen' by the definition of leading Southern newspapers. With damning delight, Carson McCullers has drawn a carefully detailed portrait of a stereotyped Southern "Colonel." He is vain, garrulous, contemptible, yet for all his human weakness, likeable. He is pitiable, even in his self pity.

> He was an enormous man with a red face and a rough halo of yellow-white hair. He wore a rumpled linen white suit, a lavender shirt, and a tie adorned with a pearl stickpin and stained with a coffee spot. His left hand had been damaged by a stroke...This hand was clean and slightly puffy from disuse--while the right one, which he used constantly as he talked, was dingy-nailed, and he wore a star sapphire on the ring finger. He was carrying an ebony cane with a silver crooked handle. (p. 11)

Not surprisingly, the Judge was the only one of the characters who remains at the end unchanged by the tragic events of the story.

By examining the physical characteristics of the main characters in Carson McCullers' five novels, some conclusions can be drawn about her general technique in external characterization. Of foremost importance is that the physical peculiarities are external manifestations of a spiritual or symbolic meaning for the individual character. Hence, Singer's deaf-muteness represents the isolation or lack of communication which exists in man; Cousin Lymon's grotesqueness is redeemable by human love; Berenice's one blue eye testifies to her faulty spiritual insight.

There is a recurrence of character types and character relationships which lend an air of unity to all the novels. For instance, the general characteristics of adolescence remain unchanged in three novels; the corresponding roles of the tyrant-like Antonapoulos and Cousin Lymon find them both the object of love; disease represents both a spiritual and physical death for characters like Copeland and Malone.

The degree of "freakishness" in Carson McCullers' characters varies in intensity, but it is never lacking. The malformation may be manifest in physical grotesqueness or in disease. Characters may be mental or emotional cripples, or they may suffer merely from the pangs of adolescence. The important thing is that abnormality exists at some level in all of Carson McCullers' novels.

The frequency and distribution of types of physical characteristics are charted on the following page.

NOVELS	PHYSICAL GROTESQUES	PHYSICAL / MENTAL DEVIATES	EMOTIONAL CRIPPLES	ADOLESCENTS
The Heart is a Lonely Hunter	Antonapoulos: obese, feebleminded. Singer: deaf-mute.	Brannon: bisexual Copeland:	Negroid, radical. Blount: radical.	Mick
Reflections in a Golden Eye	Williams: primitive, feebleminded. Leonora: animalistic, feebleminded.	Alison: heart disease, distraut. Anacleto: sprite-like, irrational. Penderton: homosexual	Langdon: insensitive	
The Member of the Wedding		Berenice: John Henry:	Negroid, false eye. sickly, asexual.	Frankie
The Ballad of the Sad Cafe	Amelia: giantess, crossed eyes. Lymon: dwarf, hunch-backed, homosexual.		Marvin: criminal instincts, cruel.	
Clock Without Hands		J.T. Malone: leukemia. Sherman: Judge: obesity, Southern fixation.	Negroid, delusions.	Jester

Figure I

Distribution of Character Types

CHAPTER III

INNER CHARACTERIZATION

John B. Vickery has pointed out that Carson McCullers' characters have a three-fold role--lover, quester, dreamer.[1] The symbolic function of these roles is brought out through the physical properties of the characters, through their inner lives, and through their actions. The most general role of all Mrs. McCullers' characters is that of the quester. As he seeks his own identity, he embodies the characteristics of the lover and the dreamer. Throughout the novels of Carson McCullers, the quester's searching nature is delineated with four major recurring devices: music, dreams, group association, and sexual identification.

Of the four major devices, music is the one which is used with nearly equal importance in all of the novels. Barbara Nauer Folk has observed:

> Musical allusions of one kind or another are to be found in almost all Mrs. McCullers' stories, music serving now as architectural framework, again as extended correlative, often and regularly as minor symbol. And in the literary context the use of music and musical references is always intelligent, functional, and openly reverent.
>
> ...she regularly uses music imagery to convey minute and subtle insights into character, situation, atmosphere. These sharp and illuminating citations, so remarkable for their aptness, flourish like dainty gracenotes in countless lines of her prose.[2]

In discussing The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, Dayton Kohler comments:

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[1]John B. Vickery, "Carson McCullers: A Map of Love," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, I (1960), 13.

[2]Barbara N. Folk, "The Sad Sweet Music of Carson McCullers, Georgia Review, XVI (1962), 207.

> Mrs. McCullers had her early training in music, and she has drawn upon her knowledge to give the design of her book its structural analogy. Themes and character motifs appear early in the novel, only to be dropped and later resumed, so that the structure becomes one of introduction, repetition, variation, dissonances, unresolved harmonies.[3]

In addition to the general structure of the novel which Mr. Kohler mentions, music imagery is used most effectively in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter in delineating the character of Mick Kelly. For Mick, music provides an added dimension of meaning to her life because it is a means of personal expression or assurance of her individual identity.

Of all the things that Mick wants in life, a room of her own and a piano are paramount. Both these desires symbolize the search for her identity; the room will provide a private place for her to be an individual, and at this time in her life music and composers have attributes of hero-worship. The poignancy of Mick's situation rests in her hunger for music and her inability to attain it. The hopelessness of her condition is best illustrated in her attempt to make a violin from a broken ukelele and some guitar and banjo strings. After hours of labor and repair, on the day she planned to tune the instrument, Mick suddenly realized that, "'It's not even a bad violin. It's only a cross between a mandolin and a ukelele. And I hate them.'" (p. 38) Anger and humiliation made her cry. "It seemed to her as she thought back over the last month that she had never really believed in her mind that the violin would work. But in her heart she had kept making herself believe a little." (p. 39)

The yearning that Mick feels but cannot name is expressed in her own compositions. She gave her lunch money to a girl at school who taught her the musical notes. Then "In January she began a certain very wonderful piece called 'This Thing I want, I Know Not What.' It was a beautiful and

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[3]Kohler, op. cit., p. 240.

marvelous song--very slow and soft...This new song made her feel sad and excited and happy all at once." (p. 205)

All that summer Mick had wandered through the wealthier neighborhoods and at night had hidden near their homes to listen to music on their radios. In two climactic scenes placed in direct sequence, Mick leaves her childhood behind and comes closer to an understanding of her place in the universe. At the end of her prom party Mick had shouted, "Everybody go home! The door is shut! The party is over!" (p. 99) She felt empty, and as she waited in the darkness the void was filled by Beethoven's Third Symphony.

> How did it come? For a minute the opening balanced from one side to the other. Like a walk or march. Like God strutting in the night. The outside of her was suddenly froze and only that first part of the music was hot inside her heart. She could not even hear what sounded after, but she sat there waiting and froze, with her fists tight. After a while the music came again, harder and loud. It didn't have anything to do with God. This was her, Mick Kelly, walking in the daytime and by herself at night. In the hot sun and in the dark with all the plans and feelings. This music was her--the real plain her. (p. 100)

The musical patterns in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter are not restricted to Mick alone. Sounds of "a kind of singing moan" (pp. 60, 77) issue from Dr. Copeland's dark throat; his daughter Portia's voice would "get started on the same tune" (p. 42) and would "go up and down like a song." (p. 41) "...her voice had a rhythm--a start, a middle, and an end." (p. 219) Musical reference is also made to Biff Brannon who played a mandolin and in a "doleful voice" would sing songs that reminded him of his marriage.

The music imagery is less dominant in Reflections in a Golden Eye. The only people to whom it has any real significance are: Alison, who it was said "once had a beautiful voice, but no one on this post had ever heard her sing;" Anacleto, who shared her interest and amused her by

combining various compositions to accompany his mock ballets; and Lieutenant Weincheck, Alison's only friend on the post.

The old lieutenant was going blind; he was a rather seedy looking bachelor who sacrificed his own small comforts to finance the education of two nephews. He played the violin and often in the afternoons Alison would visit him and they "...would play Mozart sonatas, or drink coffee and eat crystallized ginger before the fire." (p. 30) Often the three of them would drive to near-by cities for concerts and plays.

Music was of little consequence to the other characters. The contrast between the sensitive, perceptive nature of Alison and duller natures of those around her is heightened by her response to music. Major Langdon on one occasion says:

> Now my wife goes in for classical stuff--Bach, you know--all that. But to me it's like swallowing a bunch of angleworms. Now take 'The Merry Widows' Waltz'--that's the sort of thing I love. Tuneful music! (pp. 64, 65)

Music is one of the most essential structural devices in The Member of the Wedding. As the action is centered in the kitchen, the music of their lives has a monotonous quality like that of the radio that played all summer. "They talked, and their voices tired down into a little tune and they said the same things over and over." (p. 14) "Every afternoon Frankie said exactly the same words to Berenice, and the answers of Berenice were always the same. So that now the words were like an ugly little tune they sang by heart." (p. 28) It reminded Frankie of "a raggedy rhyme said by two crazies." (p. 29)

The structural unity provided by the musical device is apparent in the repeated references to their voices and tunes, in the dialogue itself, and finally, in a very direct statement by Mrs. McCullers. She wrote that "...often on these summer evenings they would suddenly start a song...and sometimes they would agree on the tune among themselves."

> Or again, they would disagree and start off on three different songs at once, until at last the tunes began to merge and they sang a special music that the three of them made together. John Henry sang in a high wailing voice, and no matter what he named his tune it sounded always just the same: Berenice's voice was dark and definite and deep, and she rapped the offbeats with her heel. The old Frankie sang up and down the middle space between John Henry and Berenice, so that their three voices were joined, and the parts of the song were woven together. (p. 116)

This passage, couched in musical terms, summarizes the relationship of the characters in the novel: Frankie is balancing between the childhood of John Henry and the maturity of Berenice.

Structurally, The Member of the Wedding can be divided into three sections, each section marked by Frankie's changing conception of her identity. In Part I she is still Frankie; Part II finds her as F. Jasmine; and in Part III she is Frances. It is significant that Part I ends with a major music reference and one of the main streams of action in Part II is related almost entirely in musical terms.

In Part I the tightness in Frankie's chest after she meets her brother and his bride is almost unbearable. Then, as she stands in darkness outside John Henry's house a strain of unfinished music wafts through the night, reflecting her own mood of incompleteness and at the same time insisting on an answer.

> Somewhere in the town, not far away, a horn began a blues tune. The tune was grieving and low. It was the sad horn of some colored boy, but who he was she did not know. Frankie stood stiff, her head bent and her eyes closed, listening. There was something about the tune that brought back to her all of the spring: flowers, the eyes of strangers, rain.
>
> The tune was low and dark and sad. Then all at once, as Frankie listened, the horn danced into a wild jazz spangle that zigzagged upward. At the end of the jazz spangle the music rattled thin and far away. Then the tune returned to the first blues song, and it was like the telling of that long season of trouble. She stood there on the dark sidewalk and the drawn tightness of her heart made her knees lock and her throat feel stiffened.

> Then, without warning, the thing happened that at first Frankie could not believe. Just at the time when the tune should be laid, the music finished, the horn broke off. All of a sudden the horn stopped playing. For a moment Frankie could not take it in, she felt so lost. (p. 41)

The broken, unfinished song demanded an ending. At the insistent pressure of the music, Frankie at last found her answer. "Her squeezed heart suddenly opened and divided. Her heart divided like two wings." (p. 42) She knew who she was; she was a member of the wedding.

With this realization, telling of the wedding became a special song for Frankie. "...the telling of the wedding had an end and a beginning, a shape like a song." (p. 57) As she hurried through the streets, "a gay band tune /was/ marching her feet." (p. 57) All through the day there was "...forgotten music that sprang suddenly to her mind...so that her feet in the patent-leather shoes stepped always according to a tune." (p. 56) As the morning progressed she wearied and "The march tunes had softened to a dreaming song on a violin that slowed her footsteps to a wander." (p. 58) Eventually, "even the tunes dragged with exhaustion." (p. 59)

The long, sad, last afternoon the three of them were ever to spend in the kitchen together was punctuated alternately with the maddening persistence of a piano tuner and painful silences.

> In the silence of the kitchen they heard the tone shaft quietly across the room, then again the same note was repeated. A piano scale slanted across the August afternoon. A chord was struck. Then in a dreaming way a chain of chords climbed slowly upward like a flight of castle stairs: but just at the end, when the eighth chord should have sounded and the scale made complete, there was a stop. This next to the last chord was repeated. The seventh chord, which seems to echo all of the unfinished scale, struck and insisted again and again. And finally there was a silence. F. Jasmine and John Henry and Berenice looked at each other. Somewhere in the neighborhood an August piano was being tuned. (p. 81)

Through the long afternoon the piano would tune, then silence would hang in the air. "'It makes me sad,' F. Jasmine said. 'And jittery, too.' . . . The quietness of the room stretched out until F. Jasmine could hear the drip-drop from the faucet of the sink." (p. 82)

There are few direct references to music within The Ballad of the Sad Cafe itself, but as the title implies, its whole structure, with the direct exposition of the narrator and its folk-legend quality assumes the characteristics of an ancient folk ballad. In the opening paragraphs the narrator mentions that on slow August afternoons when there is nothing else to do, one can always go down to Forks Fall Road and listen to the chain gang sing. As an epilogue to The Ballad of the Sad Cafe Mrs. McCullers wrote "The Twelve Mortal Men." Men in striped prison garb work with picks on the road all day in the hot Georgia sun, but "every day there is music."

> One dark voice will start a phrase, half-sung, and like a question. And after a moment another voice will join in, soon the whole gang will be singing. The voices are dark in the golden glare, the music intricately blended, both somber and joyful. The music will swell until at last it seems that the sound does not come from the twelve mortal men on the gang, but from the earth itself, or the wide sky. It is music that causes the heart to broaden and the listener to grow cold with ecstasy and fright. Then slowly the music will sink down until at last there remains one lonely voice, then a great hoarse breath, the sun, the sound of the picks in the silence.
>
> And what kind of gang is this that can make such music? Just twelve mortal men, seven of them black and five of them white boys from this country. Just twelve mortal men who are together. (pp. 71, 72)

Even in their misery and pain the chain gang can sing because they are together. They have an identity, no matter how squalid, and they are not alone. It is these same qualities that run through the themes of loneliness, love, and identity and which give Carson McCullers' characters their three-fold function as searchers, lovers, and dreamers.

Clock Without Hands finds a return to the adolescent and again music is used as a symbol of his search. It is music that first brings Jester

and Sherman together, and it is through this stimulus that Jester is sexually initiated. Jester was seventeen years old and particularly self-conscious about his sexual naivete. Then one night:

> As he lay there sweating and still unsolaced, a sudden spasm lifted him. He was hearing from far away a tune played on a piano and a dark voice singing...It was a blues tune, voluptuous and grieving. The music came from the lane behind the Judge's property where Negroes lived. As the boy listened the jazz sadness blossomed and was left unshattered. (p. 40)

Then when he went to the blue-eyed Negro's house:

> The music still throbbed in his body and Jester quailed when he faced the blue eyes opposite him. They were cold and blazing in the dark and sullen face. They reminded him of something that made him quiver with sudden shame. He questioned wordlessly the overwhelming feeling. Was it fear? Was it love? Or was it--at last, was it--passion? The jazz sadness shattered. (p. 40)

It seems natural that Jester should be attracted to Sherman's singing. His mother had been a music major in college and he played the piano. Ironically, he tried to impress Sherman with his playing, but because Jester had more skill, Sherman was jealous and spitefully cruel.

Sherman's music was natural and spontaneous. His beautiful singing voice led him and Jester to indulge in the fantasy that Marian Anderson might be his mother. This reflects a further complexity in Sherman's character. He is constantly beset with contradictions of his real world and the one he dreams of. This contradiction is demonstrated in his attitude toward Negro spirituals.

> Spirituals had always offended Sherman. First, they would make him cry and make a fool of himself which was mortally hateful to him; second, he had always lashed out that it was nigger music, but how could he say that if Marian Anderson was his true mother? (p. 72)

Hammering middle C became a characteristic gesture of Sherman. As he hammered, he said that he could hear every tone in the scale and they acted as vibrations of injustice. He said, "I register every single vibration that happens to those of my race...I vibrate--vibrate--and vibrate, see?" (p. 75)

Significantly, just before Sherman is killed he sits at his newly purchased baby grand piano, laughing hysterically and pounding middle C. From outside the murderer watched:

> Sherman was playing the piano and Sammy watched him curiously, wondering how a nigger could learn to play a piano. Then Sherman began to sing. His strong dark throat was thrown back, and it was at that throat that Sammy aimed the bomb. Since he was only a few yards away, the bomb was a direct hit. (p. 204)

The abundance of music imagery throughout the work of Carson McCullers has a cumulative effectiveness much like that of the repeated use of physical freakishness. In three novels music imagery is used to characterize the search for meaning in life. This is seen in the novels dealing with the adolescents, Mick, Frankie, and Jester. In Reflections in a Golden Eye, an appreciation of music distinguishes the sensitive individuals who represent spiritualism from those who represent animalism. In two novels, The Member of the Wedding and The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, music serves as a unifying structural device which enhances the insularity of fewer characters and a close setting. In Carson McCullers' overall work, music is a unifying image which illustrates the continuing philosophy and purpose in her writing.

The second major device used for delineating inward character is that of dreams. J. B. Vickery has written that "Dream and reality are juxtaposed not simply for the sake of irony but as a poignant illustration of a man's need to seek, to love, to dream."[4] Dream structure appears in three forms in the novels of Carson McCullers: indirectly, in dream-like structures and images, in the daydreams of the characters, and in particular dreams of the characters which reflect a certain aspect of their character.

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[4]Vickery, op. cit., p. 14.

In The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, dreaming takes the forms of daydreams and particular dreams. Mick Kelly's dreams are the daydreams of youth, filled with heroism and fame. Mick dreamed that when she was seventeen she would be a great inventor; she would invent "little tiny radios the size of a green pea," and "flying machines people could fasten on their backs," and she would be the first person to tunnel to China. (p. 29) Later daydreams centered around music, Mister Singer, and fame. When she was twenty she would be a world-famous composer.

> She would have a whole symphony orchestra and conduct all of her music herself. She would stand up on the platform in front of the big crowds of people. To conduct the orchestra she would wear either a real man's evening suit or else a red dress spangled with rhinestones. The curtains of the stage would be red velvet and M. K. would be printed on them in gold. Mister Singer would be there, and afterward they would go out and eat fried chicken. (p. 205)

Of her particular dreams, Mick relates:

> This is a funny thing--the dreams I've been having lately. It's like I'm swimming. But instead of water I'm pushing out my arms and swimming through great big crowds of people. The crowd is a hundred times bigger than in Kresses stores on Saturday afternoon. The biggest crowd in the world. And sometimes I'm yelling and swimming through people, knocking them all down wherever I go--and other times I'm on the ground and people are trompling all over me and my insides are oozing out on the sidewalk. I guess it's more like a nightmare than a plain dream--. (p. 33)

The violence and the crowds in Mick's dreams are also reflected in the paintings she did in the "free government art class for school kids." Her first picture was "...a storm on the ocean and a sea gull being dashed through the air by the wind." But after that all her pictures were filled with people in direful situations--plane crashes, shipwrecks, fires, explosions, and street fights. Of the latter there is this comment:

> The oil painting was a picture of the whole town fighting on Broad Street. She never knew why she had painted this one and she couldn't think of the right name for it. There wasn't any fire or storm or reason you could see in

> the picture why all this battle was happening. But there were more people and more moving around than in any other picture. This was the best one, and it was too bad that she couldn't think up the real name. In the back of her mind somewhere she knew what it was. (p. 37)

The similar themes in Mick's paintings and dreams correspond also to the forementioned music device. In her heroic fantasies Mick is searching for her place in the world. The masses of people may provide the opportunity for her victories, or they may be the instrument of her defeat.

Jake Blount is the other character in the novel who most lacks a personal identity and it is perhaps because of this that his dreams, which are also filled with crowds of people, are so similar to Mick's. Jake works at a local amusement park and the description of his shouldering his way through crowds is very reminiscent of his dreams. After a lonely weekend, "...he returned to the show with relief. It eased him to push through the crowds of people...the shouldering contact of human flesh soothed his jangled nerves." (p. 131)

For some time Jake was haunted by a "blank, stealthy" unremembered dream that left a "faint remembrance of the darkness behind him." (p. 240) He said the dream recurred about fifteen times. Then one day he remembered:

> He had been walking through a great crowd of people--like at the show. But there was also something Eastern about the people around him. There was a terrible bright sun and the people were half-naked. They were silent and slow and their faces had a look of starvation. There was no sound, only the sun and the silent crowd of people. He walked among them and he carried a huge covered basket. He was taking the basket somewhere but he could not find a place to leave it. And in the dream there was a peculiar horror in wandering on and on through the crowd and not knowing where to lay down the burden he had carried in his arms so long. (p. 297)

Jake's dream reflects the basic characteristics of his relationship with the world. He feels strongly about the suffering masses and longs to help them; he feels that he has a way, a plan to end their misery. The burden he carries in the dream symbolizes his unformulated plan for reform.

The concrete details of the dream and its execution are never defined for Jake, and as he leaves town after Singer's death, his destiny seems to be to wander on and on.

The important role which dreams play in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is illustrated in Singer's visionary perception of the mystical relationship of all the characters. The dream is a key symbol in the allegorical structure and interpretation of the novel. A discussion of this dream follows in Chapter V.

The contents of the dreams which appear in Reflections in a Golden Eye vary in complexity according to the mental condition of the dreamer. The simple, uncomplicated characters in Reflections in a Golden Eye have simple, uncomplicated dreams. As Leonora is roused from her sleep she mumbles about basting a turkey; later as she smiles in her sleep her husband knows she must be eating the turkey. He can safely predict her dreams because, like her mind, they are simple.

Similarly, the dreams of Private Williams are mentioned--but no interpretation is given them because in the deep recesses of his mind Williams himself is only dimly aware of their existence. The young soldier had seldom dreamed, but now he dreams of "The Lady" every night.

By contrast, Anacleto's dreams are complex and detailed. He is aware of the varying quality and moods of his dreams and comments on them.

> The quality of dreams...That is a strange thing to think about. On afternoons in the Philippines, when the pillow is damp and the sun shines in the room, the dream is of one sort. And then in the North at night when it is snowing--(p. 74)

There was little orderly, rational thinking in Anacleto's mind and the particular dream he relates is characteristic of the fantastic combinations of visions and moods of which he was capable.

> 'It was troubling,' he said quietly. 'Rather like holding a butterfly in my hands. I was nursing her (

> [Alison's dead child] on my lap--then sudden convulsions--and you were trying to get the hot water to run...Then the dream changed, and instead of Catherine I had on my knees one of the Major's boots that I had to clean twice today. The boot was full of squirming newborn mice and I was trying to hold them in and keep them from crawling up all over me. Whoo! (p. 73)

The dream content of Carson McCullers' first two novels was more direct than in The Member of the Wedding and The Ballad of the Sad Cafe. Here the dream device is more indirect and is suggested more by general structure and other images than by specific dreams. Irving Malin has written that "In Gothic, order often breaks down: chronology is confused, identity is blurred, sex is twisted, the buried life erupts. The total effect is that of a dream."[5] This dream-like quality is particularly evident in The Member of the Wedding and in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe. In the former, the distortion of images, the inability to interpret events, the treadmill action, and the sudden contrasts of silences and sounds all contribute to the overall dream effect of the novel.

For Frankie, "the summer was like a sick green dream, or like a silent crazy jungle under glass." (p. 1) There was a "watery kitchen mirror" that reflected a "warped and crooked" image of the kitchen with the crazy pictures drawn on the walls. (p. 2) This setting reflects Frankie's whole attitude of the summer.

When Frankie first met her brother and his bride, "there was a brightness where his face should be," and "the bride also was faceless," (p. 2) like persons in a dream. Afterward, she was unable to interpret the meeting for herself and asked Berenice to tell her about it. She said, "Have you ever seen any people that afterward you remembered more like a feeling than a picture." And, "I saw them O.K....Yet it was like I couldn't see all of them I wanted to see." (p. 27)

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[5]Malin, op. cit., p. 10.

The entire episode with the soldier is described as a nightmare-carnival. After Frankie arrived at the cafe she thought:

> It was like going into a fair booth, or fair ride, that once having entered you cannot leave until the exhibition or the ride is finished. Now it was the same with this soldier, this date. (p. 128)

> To his joking remarks she could never find replies that fitted, although she tried. Like a nightmare pupil in a recital who has to play a duet to a piece she does not know, F. Jasmine did her best to catch the tune and follow. But soon she broke down and grinned until her mouth felt wooden. The blue lights in the crowded room, the smoke and noisy commotion, confused her also. (p. 128)

Only one particular dream is mentioned in the book and that is the one which Frankie tells to the fortune teller. At the old woman's insistence, Frankie finally remembers a dream and tells her:

> 'I dreamed there was a door...I was just looking at it and while I watched, it began slowly to open. And it made me feel funny and I woke up. (p. 120)

In relation to the whole novel, this dream is particularly significant because it points up the chief symbol used for Frankie throughout the narrative--the door. In the opening paragraph Frankie is described as "an unjoined person who hung around in doorways." (p. 1) Numerous references to Frankie in doorways are repeated in the novel. This summer Frankie was too big to get inside the arbor, so "she had to hang around and pick from the edges like grown people." (p. 6) On greeting her brother and his bride, "She stood in the doorway, coming in from the hall..." (p. 24) When she said and did the wrong things she would stand, "sickened and empty, in the kitchen door..." (p. 23) When the time for her departure for the wedding arrived, "she stood there with her head and shoulder leaning against the door jamb, somehow unready." (p. 106) The old Frankie would never have entered the Blue Moon Cafe; she "only hung around the edges..." but this morning before the wedding was different. She crossed the threshold.

The Freudian interpretation of the door as a birth symbol is applicable here because Frankie is being born into maturity. But the process is not complete, so she is still poised in the doorway which leads from childhood to adulthood.

The Ballad of the Sad Cafe and Clock Without Hands are without any particular dreams, but the latter does contain the characteristic dreams of adolescents who yearn for heroism and fame. Like Mick and Frankie, Jester dreams of widespread travel; he experiences the daydreams of youthful love, and sees himself as an aviation hero. Later, with his knowledge of his personal identity, he dreams of being a champion of equal rights for all races.

The orphan Sherman Pew's daydreams also turn on his sense of personal identity. Always seeking his mother, he dreams of a filial reunion with Marian Anderson. Sherman's other expressions of dreams come in the fantastic lies he tells on the slightest provocation. He recounts tales of racial incidents and wartime experiences in France (he was never in the army or France) with renewed embellishments at each telling.

The dream devices which Mrs. McCullers uses, either indirectly in dream-like structure or in reference to particular dreams, serve her purpose well in conveying a deeper level of meaning and interpretation of her stories.

A common basis for self-identification is that which comes from association with another person, a group, or a cause. Hence, a character's attitude toward membership in society is an essential device in delineating him as a "quester." A primary concern of Mrs. McCullers is whether or not the characters will be able to find the personal identity or the protection against loneliness that is basic to all her themes.

Group association in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is concerned with both personal and social identification. For Mick, the association is

personal; for Jake and Dr. Copeland it is based more on a need for society. Mick Kelly does not belong to the Girl Scouts, she does not attend church; apparently she belongs to no particular "bunch." But she wants to belong. In her first year at vocational high school she becomes aware of this need.

> In the halls the people would walk up and down together and everybody seemed to belong to some special bunch. Within a week or two she knew people in the halls and in classes to speak to them--but that was all. She wasn't a member of any bunch. In Grammar School she would have just gone up to any crowd she wanted to belong with and that would have been the end of the matter. Here it was different. (p. 88)

In order to become a member of a "bunch," Mick gave a party. It was disastrous. The decorations were reduced to shambles and the dressed-up young people were transformed into screaming children. It didn't work. Mick said, "The party is over. The door is shut." And it was. There is no mention of further attempts to belong, but the need is still reflected in Mick's paintings and dreams which are filled with people to whom she acts alternately as hero and whipping boy.

Jake Blount is probably the most alone character in all Carson McCullers' novels. He has no home, belongs to no group, cannot make even a general class reference with his Fascist group and he seems to feel his solitary condition more than anyone else. He frequents all-night cafes, seeks out strangers for conversation, and cannot bear the emptiness of his room on Sunday when he doesn't work.

Jake explains his origins and his loneliness early in the book. When Biff asks where he is from, he replies, "Nowhere." (p. 17) Biff observes that "He was like a man who had served a term in prison or had been to Harvard College or had lived for a long time with foreigners in South American." (p. 17) In his crazy, disjointed manner Jake says, "I'm part nigger and wop and bohunk and chink. All of those...And I'm Dutch and Turkish and Japanese and American...I'm the one who knows. I'm a stranger in a strange land." (p. 18)

Group association is important in a rather negative way in Reflections in a Golden Eye. Private Williams is repeatedly characterized by his solitude, and Captain Penderton, who is not at ease with army officers longs for the imagined comradery of the enlisted men's barracks. It is Alison's inability to cope with the distorted society she sees around her that leads to her eventual destruction.

The Member of the Wedding returns to the adolescent's need for identity in the world, and Frankie is acutely aware of her non-belonging. It is the strongly felt but dimly recognized lack of a place in the world that leads to the "queer tightness" in Frankie's chest. She knew both a physical and a spiritual exclusion.

> There was in the neighborhood a clubhouse, and Frankie was not a member...Frankie knew all the club members, and until this summer she had been like a younger member of their crowd, but now they had this club and she was not a member. They had said she was too young and mean. On Saturday night she could hear the terrible music and see from far away their light. Sometimes she went around to the alley behind the clubhouse and stood near the honey-suckle fence. She stood in the alley and watched and listened. They were very long, those parties. (p. 10)

Frankie's spiritual abandonment came from her recognition of the "we" feeling that others around her knew.

> She was an I person who had to walk around and do things by herself. All other people had a we to claim, all other except her. When Berenice said we, she meant Honey and Big Mama, her lodge, or her church. The we of her father was the store. All members of clubs have a we to belong to and talk about. The soldiers in the army can say we, and even the criminals on chain-gangs. But the old Frankie had no we to claim, unless it would be the terrible summer we of her and John Henry and Berenice--and that was the last we in the world she wanted. Now all this was suddenly over with and changed. There was her brother and the bride, and it was as though when first she saw them she had known inside of her: They are the we of me. (pp. 39, 40)

After associating herself with the bridal couple, Frankie dreams of traveling around the world with them and meeting people.

> 'And we will meet them. Everybody. We will just walk up to people and know them right away. We will be walking down a dark road and see a lighted house and knock on the door and strangers will rush to meet us and say: Come in! We will know decorated aviators and New York people and movie stars. We will have thousands of friends, thousands and thousands and thousands of friends. We will belong to so many clubs that we can't even keep track of them. We will be members of the whole world. Boyoman! Manoboy!' (p. 112)

The heartbreaking result of her dream is assuaged somewhat by the opening of a new school term and by her finding a "best friend." But ruptures have occurred: John Henry is dead, and Berenice is leaving. In the thematic pattern of Carson McCullers' work, Frankie's happiness is only a temporary stay against the inevitable loneliness of man.

The importance of group association is not found in the body of The Ballad of the Sad Cafe itself so much as it is in the epilogue, "Twelve Mortal Men." In her description of the chain gang singing as they labor in the hot Georgia sun, Mrs. McCullers' philosophy on the necessity of human companionship is illustrated. No matter how miserable, men can ease the pain of their existence and can sing if they are together.

The search for identity is on a more personal basis in Clock Without Hands. Each man is seeking to know himself, and this realization is found in part through group association. Sherman Pew identified with the Golden Nigerians, a local Negro organization struggling for voting rights. Jester Clane did not identify with his community, but he eventually identified with problems of the general South through his association with Sherman. The old judge identified with an old southern tradition which was long dead, and J. T. Malone suffered because he did not identify with any group or person outside himself. In his isolation, he saw his life as meaningless.

The importance of group association as a stay against the loneliness of man is emphasized throughout Carson McCullers' novels. She does not imply that man must be burdened with membership in numerous civic clubs.

Man will always need his "inside room" of private dreams. But he cannot live forever in the inside room, and to find peace in his physical world, he needs a spiritual unity with his fellow "pilgrims of loneliness."[6]

In their symbolic quest for identification, Carson McCullers' characters are constantly frustrated by the inconsistencies of human nature, or, more specifically, by the inadequacies of their own personalities. Their frustrations are often found in their inability to make satisfactory sexual identification. Frank Baldanza comments that "physical and mental defects have driven away all possibility of normal intercourse."[7] Impossible pairings of physical or emotional opposites, sexual innocence of adolescence, and sexual ambivalence are conditions common to all her characters. Carson McCullers' main concern is not with physical love, but with spiritual love. The absence of any normal expression of physical love may suggest that in Mrs. McCullers' philosophy of unreciprocated love the two kinds of love are not compatible. A final resolution on the physical aspect of her love philosophy is difficult to determine.

In The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, characterization based on sexual identification centers on the sexual initiation of Mick Kelly. Mick had never seriously considered the sex role which she, as a young woman, would soon be expected to assume; therefore, in the suddenness of the situation in which she finds herself, she is defenseless against the sex urge.

The setting for Mick and Harry's sexual initiation is a dense, isolated woods which suggests a primal virginity and innocence. Nearby is a swimming hole, and even though Mick cannot swim, she plunges in.

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[6]Jane Hart, "Carson McCullers, Pilgrim of Loneliness," Georgia Review, XI (1957), 52.

[7]Baldanza, op. cit., p. 152.

The unity of setting and action is enforced by the plunging swiftness of her sexual initiation which, like the swim, leads her to new knowledge and demands certain physical reactions.[8]

Mrs. McCullers' description of the sex act itself is contained in only a few sentences:

> They both turned at the same time. They were close against each other. She felt him trembling and her fists were tight enough to crack. 'Oh, God,' he kept saying over and over. It was like her head was broke off from her body and thrown away. And her eyes looked up straight into the blinding sun while she counted something in her mind. And then this was the way.
> This was how it was.

The effect of the bare description of the sex act is such that the emphasis is shifted away from the act itself and directed toward its consequences in the reactions of Mick and Harry. Following their brief intercourse, Harry was filled with recriminations. He said, "'It was all my fault. Adultery is a terrible sin any way you look at it. And you were two years younger than me and just a kid.'" (p. 235)

Mick replied, "'No, I wasn't. I wasn't any kid. But now I wish I was, though.'" (p. 236) Later, as they continued home, the evening shadows lengthened and Mick "felt very old, and it was like something was heavy inside her. She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not." (p. 236)

The conditions of Mick's sexual initiation are indicative of her eventual fate. She is prematurely plunged into the workaday world of reality. Financial responsibilities are hers before she is ready to cope with them; she is forced to abandon the dreams of youth before she turns sixteen. "She was a grown person now, whether she wanted to be or not." (p. 236)

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[8]Freudian psychology associates water with birth, a symbol which might be applicable in this instance as Mick is "born" into maturity or knowledge.

The sexual identities in Reflections in a Golden Eye run the gamut from the asexuality of Anacleto through Captain Penderton's homosexuality, to the primal urgency of the captain's wife and her lover. The sterile inactivity of the army post in peacetime suggests the helplessness of the characters who, because of their emotional or mental defects, will never attain a satisfying sexual identity.

The varied degrees of sexual characteristics presented in Reflections in a Golden Eye can be seen in a summary of the characters' peculiarities, ranging from Anacleto to Private Ellgee Williams. Anacleto is desexualized, sprite-like, merely an extension of his mistress's equally sexless personality. Alison Langdon, tortured by the death of her child and the knowledge of her husband's unfaithfulness, symbolically denies her sex when she mutilates her breasts with the gardening shears. A homosexual, Captain Penderton was balanced "between the male and female elements, with the susceptibilities of both sexes and the active powers of none." (p. 8) The captain's wife and Alison's husband, as mirror opposites of their mates, carry on a lustful affair with amoral casualness. Neither of them indicate any guilt feelings and they act with their spouses' full knowledge. The casualness of the relationship between Leonora and Langdon is indicated in the major's musings about their first intercourse. "And Lord! when they were scrambling around those bushes together filling his hat with berries, it had first happened. At nine in the morning and two hours after they met!" (p. 40) For all his animalism, sex was not a dominant urge in Private Williams. Instead, he mistrusted and feared women as carriers of diseases. Williams had been reared in an exclusively male household and before seeing Leonora, he had never seen a naked woman. The impulses which the sight of Leonora stirred within him are as deep-seated and vague as his thought processes.

Unlike her other novels, Carson McCullers creates little sympathy for her characters in Reflections in a Golden Eye. Part of this omission doubtless lies in the austere objectivity of the narration, but another factor may be in the dehumanization of her characters. They are real enough in terms of literary realism, but they have none of the saving graces of humanity. They are unloved and unlovable.

A return to sexual initiation in adolescence is seen in The Member of the Wedding. The attempted seduction by the red-haired soldier is averted when Frankie, in panic, hits him with a water pitcher. Frankie's innocent involvement with the soldier, who thought she was much older than her twelve years, was something she was unprepared to cope with. From the beginning, the episode was like a disjointed nightmare to Frankie. After meeting the soldier at the cafe, he invited her to his room upstairs.

> F. Jasmine did not want to go upstairs, but she did not know how to refuse. It was like going into a fair booth, or fair ride, that once having entered you cannot leave until the exhibition or the ride is finished. Now it was the same with the soldier, this date. She could not leave until it ended. (p. 128)

Once in the room, her puzzlement increased until the action of the averted seduction released her from the room.

> ...as she passed the soldier, he grasped her skirt and, limpened by fright, she was pulled down beside him on the bed. The next minute happened, but it was too crazy to be realized. She felt his arms around her and smelled his sweaty shirt. He was not rough, but it was crazier than if he had been rough--and in a second she was paralyzed by horror. She could not push away, but she bit down with all her might upon what must have been the crazy soldier's tongue--so that he screamed out and she was free. Then he was coming toward her with an amazed pained face, and her hand reached the glass pitcher and brought it down on his head. He swayed a second, then slowly his legs began to crumple, and slowly he sank sprawling to the floor. (p. 130)

As Frankie fled the room,

> There slanted across her mind twisted remembrances of a common fit in the front room, basement remarks, and nasty

> Barney; but she did not let these separate glimpses fall together, and the word she repeated was 'crazy.' (p. 130)

Sex was not yet a part of Frankie's world; she still clung to her youthful dreams. But someday she would have to "let the glimpses fall together" and then one may only speculate on what her eventual resolution with physical love might be.

Love, in its most bizarre manifestations, is the central theme of The Ballad of the Sad Cafe. As Mrs. McCullers explains in her philosophy of love, "the most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love." But in the context of her story, it is made clear that the stimulus which love generates need not be a sexual one. Of the three characters in the book, Marvin Macy is the only one whose sexual activity approaches normalcy. However, because of his ruthless, criminal personality the animalism inherent in his sexual drives also has a debasing effect. The other two characters have pointed traits of sexual deviation. Miss Amelia is plainly masculine, and Cousin Lymon's effeminate mannerisms and infatuation with Marvin Macy suggest homosexuality.

Miss Amelia's strong masculine traits desexualize her. She has "bones and muscles like a man" (p. 4) and she "cared nothing for the love of men." (p. 4) She went about a man's work and scorned the woman's role. When patients came to her with a "female complaint" she was embarrassed and refused to treat them. And after ten days, either because of ignorance or obstinacy, her marriage to the confused and frustrated Marvin Macy remained unconsummated. With these facts known about Miss Amelia, a physical union between her and Cousin Lymon seems highly unlikely. But love changed Miss Amelia in many ways, and her personal relationships with her beloved are left unspecified by the narrator of the story. Instead, with candor and reserve, the narrator makes the following observation:

> The time has come to speak of love. For Miss Amelia loved Cousin Lymon. So much was clear to everyone. They lived in the same house together and were never seen apart. Therefore, according to Mrs. MacPhail, a warty-nosed old busybody who is continually moving her sticks of furniture from one part of the front room to another; according to her and to certain others, these two were living in sin. If they were related, they were only a cross between first and second cousins, and even that could in no way be proved. Now, of course, Miss Amelia was a powerful blunderbuss of a person, more than six feet tall--and Cousin Lymon a weakly little hunchback reaching only to her waist. But so much the better for Mrs. Stumpy MacPhail and her cronies, for they and their kind glory in conjunctions which are ill-matched and pitiful. So let them be. The good people thought that if those two had found some satisfaction of the flesh between themselves, then it was a matter concerning them and God alone. All sensible people agreed in their opinion.... (p. 26)

Just as the physical relationship between Amelia and Lymon is never made specific, neither is the dwarf's homosexuality. Such indefiniteness obscures somewhat Mrs. McCullers' final position on physical love. In previous novels a harmonious sexual relationship does not exist. In The Ballad of the Sad Cafe one doubts its existence, but room for its possibility is left to the reader. In terms of this novel, the most one can assume is that the importance of physical love to spiritual love is inconsequential.

Sexual initiation in adolescence appears for the third time in Carson McCullers' last novel, Clock Without Hands. Jester Clane's sexual initiation differs from the sudden, unexpected initiations of Mick and Frankie in that he actively sought his first experience. At seventeen, Jester was very sensitive about his failure to assert a masculine sex force. His youthful crushes on a high school athlete and his English teacher had not stirred in him the passion he longed for. It is Sherman Pew, the Negro, who provides the impetus for Jester's recognition of his purpose in life, who also provides the stimulus for Jester's sexual initiation.

The night Jester first heard Singer singing, "a sudden spasm lifted him" (p. 40) and he went to the Negro's house. As Jester stood in the doorway,

> The music still throbbed in his body and Jester quailed when he faced the blue eyes opposite him. They were cold and blazing in the dark and sullen face. They reminded him of something that made him quiver with sudden shame. He questioned wordlessly the overwhelming feeling. Was it fear? Was it love? Or was it--at last, was it--passion? (p. 40)

Directly after leaving Sherman's house, Jester went to a house of prostitution and there, with closed eyes, "and having in mind a dark face and blue flickering eyes, he was able to become a man." (p. 76) This incident and another in which Jester kisses Sherman suggest homosexuality, but in the ambivalence and infatuations of adolescence, such a condition is difficult (and needless) to establish. At any rate, the sexual stimulus which Sherman Pew gives to Jester provides another step towards Jester's recognition of his own personal identity.

The personal identity of Sherman Pew is tenuous, at best. As an orphan he knows nothing about his "antecedents" (p. 60) and he has been unable to construct a foundation for his individual personality. Sherman's sexual experience reflects his chaotic world of non-identification. On his eleventh birthday, Mrs. Stevens, Sherman's foster parent, gave him a combination birthday-halloween party. It was on that day that the woman's husband, Mr. Stevens, molested Sherman. Sherman told Jester of the incident.

> 'When Mr. Stevens called out behind the coal house I ran to him quickly, my ghost sheet flying. When he caught me I thought he was just playing and I was laughing fit to kill. I was still laughing fit to kill when I realized he wasn't playing. Then I was too surprised to know what to do but I quit laughing.' (p. 128)

The shock of this molestation left Sherman with a stammer and only dim recollections of the other events of the day. Sherman says, "'From the time the party began until in the evening after it was over I don't

remember hardly a single thing. For it was the evening of the fine party that Mr. Stevens boogered me.'" (p. 128)

The trauma of his experience left Sherman mistrustful of others and more and more absorbed with himself. Once in Sherman's mock-translation of a German leider, Jester detected this self-absorption and commented, "'It sounds like a love song to yourself.'" (p. 69)

In general, love, either spiritual or physical, receives less emphasis in Clock Without Hands than in any of Mrs. McCullers' novels. The emphasis lies in finding one's self, and insofar as a person is concerned for his fellow man the knowledge of self is possible for him. Through Sherman Pew, Jester Clane receives the impetus to make a physical identification for himself, but more important is the love for Sherman which leads him to defend the right of human dignity.

It is difficult to make a final assessment of Carson McCullers' position concerning the relationship of physical love to spiritual love. On the basis of the sexual identification of her characters, one may assume that physical desire is not essential to spiritual love. Whether or not a mutually satisfying physical relationship is even possible for love remains inexplicit. Keeping in mind her thesis that love is seldom a similar experience for two people (one will be the lover and the other the beloved) a mutual sex experience seems doubtful; however, the importance of sexual identification in the development of character cannot be denied because, like Carson McCullers' other devices of inner characterization its presence throughout all her novels serves to unify not only the individual novels but all her work.

CHAPTER IV

SETTING

The symbolic unity in the novels of Carson McCullers is seen not only in the external and internal symbolism of her characters, but also in the settings where they appear. As a southern town, an army post, a kitchen, and a cafe are employed as microcosms, the insular quality they provide maintains the symbolic theme and structure of each novel. Jane Hart in "Carson McCullers, Pilgrim of Loneliness," wrote:

> The theme of loneliness is a constant one, recurring, if not openly to or within a character, symbolically in the imagery or description. The towns are nearly always small and provincial,[1] lonely Southern towns where 'in the faces along the streets there was the desperate look of hunger and of loneliness.' They are always places where men walk alone, forever strangers and alone but seeking solidarity and kinship with others.[2]

Frank Baldanza in "Plato in Dixie" also comments on the significance of the southern setting in Mrs. McCullers' work:

> The whole society of these novels is a microcosm. The clearly defined hierarchy of Southern society gives cohesion to this world, while its local, economic, and climactic isolation give it color and character.[3]

He continues to say that "...within such a society values tend to be more clearly realized and the novelist has a ready-made system against

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[1]The 30,000 population of a "fairly large town" does not necessarily imply 'small provincialism.' The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is the only novel to which this term can rightfully apply.

[2]Hart, op. cit., p. 57.

[3]Baldanza, op. cit., p. 156.

which to construct his own little world."[4] He further observes that "There is little overt strife involved between the society as a whole and the little group, except in the smouldering resentments of The Heart is a Lonely Hunter,"[5] and, it might be added, in Clock Without Hands. where the social values play a more prominent part of the action and theme than in any of Mrs. McCullers' earlier novels.

Even though the general setting for Carson McCullers' novels is a southern town, an even smaller, more isolated framework is given for the action within the primary setting. For example, the town in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter is given a rather detailed description. It is a "fairly large" southern town with a population of "around 30,000."

> The town was in the middle of the deep South. The summers were long and the months of winter cold were very few. Nearly always the sky was a glassy, brilliant azure and the sun burned down riotously bright. Then the light, chill rains of November would come, and perhaps later there would be frost and some short months of cold. The winters were changeable, but the summers always were burning hot...the largest buildings in the town were the factories, which employed a large percentage of the population. These cotton mills were big and flourishing and most of the workers in the town were very poor. Often in the faces along the streets there was the desperate look of hunger and of loneliness. (pp. 3, 4)

The town, which is essentially the same setting for The Member of the Wedding and Clock Without Hands, does establish the tension for the racial theme in Dr. Copeland, but the characters are seen primarily in smaller settings. They come together in Biff Brannon's New York Cafe, disperse to their separate rooms, or go separately to John Singer's room.

Cafe settings figure prominently in three of Mrs. McCullers' novels. In The Heart is a Lonely Hunter it provides the enclosing framework of

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[4] Ibid., p, 156.

[5] Ibid., p. 157.

the entire action. The first meeting of the main characters is set in the cafe and the final episode is concluded in the cafe. At the story's end, Singer is dead and Copeland is gone. Blount makes his farewell in the cafe. Only Mick remains, and Biff is there to wonder why.

The framework of the cafe also emphasizes the point of view which is often directed through Biff Brannon. From behind the counter he is removed from the action, and the situation for his objective comments is assured.

As unsatisfied individuals who are constantly searching for something outside themselves, the people in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter cannot find the peace they seek in their own rooms. Biff Brannon escapes the conflict in his home by staying in the cafe. Jake Blount could not bear his room where "the walls and floor had a wet, sour smell. Sooty, cheap lace curtains hung at the window..." (p. 130) So Jake wandered through the streets or sought refuge at the cafe or in Singer's room.

Mick Kelly had no room of her own, so she manufactured a mental retreat known as her "inside room." The properties of her inside room represent the hopes and dreams of her youth; her "outside room" in the reality of the world around her. The symbols of the inside and outside rooms represent Mick's need for an identity compatible with her dreams and with reality. Because she had to share a room with her sisters, Mick's desire for a room of her own was particularly strong. She once thought, "Next to a real piano I sure would rather have a place to myself than anything I know." (p. 43) Her place would be a haven for her and her music.[6] It would be

> ...some place where she could go to hum it out loud. Some kind of music was too private to sing in a house

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[6]The interwoven association of music and Mick's "inner room" is a good example of the unity and interdependence of Carson McCullers' characters, setting, and imagery.

> cram full of people. It was funny, too, how lonesome a person could be in a crowded house. Mick tried to think of some good private place where she could go and be by herself and study about this music. But though she thought about this a long time she knew in the beginning that there was no good place. (p. 45)

Just as Mick had sensed the futility of making a real violin, she knew also the hopelessness of finding a place of her own. To compensate, she made a mental world, an "inside room" where nothing unpleasant could intrude.

> With her it was like there was two places--the inside room and the outside room. School and the family and the things that happened every day were in the outside room. Mister Singer was in both rooms. Foreign countries and plans and music were in the inside room. The songs she thought about were there. And the symphony. When she was by herself in this inside room the music she had heard that night after the party would come back to her. This symphony grew slow like a big flower in her mind. During the day sometimes, or when she had just waked up in the morning, a new part of the symphony would suddenly come to her. Then she would have to go into the inside room and listen to it many times and try to join it into the parts of the symphony she remembered, The inside room was a very private place. She could be in the middle of a house full of people and still feel like she was locked up by herself. (p. 138)

Hard times came upon the Kellys and the children were forced to eat left-overs from the boarders' tables. Sometimes Mick and her little brother George would be "downright hungry for two or three days." As the outside world darkened, Mick's attachment to Mister Singer intensified and he became a part of the inside room; gradually, his presence replaced the room altogether. "Now she could not stay in the inside room." (p. 262) The only music in her life now was "a phrase of hurrying jazz music." (p. 262) She thought only of Mister Singer and followed him everywhere.

In the swift, concluding events of the story, Mick is plunged into a situation of grim finality. Singer is dead, and she is trapped behind the costume jewelry counter at the Woolworth store. The inside room is lost forever.

> ...no music was in her mind. That was a funny thing. It was like she was shut out from the inside room. Sometimes a quick little tune would come and go-- but she never went into the inside room with music like she used to do. It was like she was too tense. Or maybe because it was like the store took all her energy and time. (p. 301)

Mick's search is ended. Her manufactured faith in Singer has been disrupted and the hopes and dreams of youth which are symbolized by the inner room are gone. The fate determined by the environment which she tried to escape has conquered.

Not only is setting used symbolically in Carson McCullers' novels, but weather and the changing seasons also reflect spiritual change and growth. The weather often has a direct influence on the characters' actions, and the seasons mirror their moods and attitudes.

Changing seasons bring a restlessness to John Singer. In the spring after Antonapoulos left, "He could not sleep and his body was very restless. At evening he would walk monotonously around the room, unable to work off a new feeling of energy." (p. 8) Winter brought the same kind of reaction. "Often he went out for long walks that had occupied him during the first months when Antonapoulos was first gone. These walks extended for miles in every direction and covered the whole of the town." (p. 168)

The description of the winter season which precipitated Singer's wanderings is typical of the poetic style Mrs. McCullers uses in her references to weather and seasons.

> The town had not known a winter as cold as this one for years. Frost formed on the windowpanes and whitened the roofs of houses. The winter afternoons glowed with a hazy lemon light and shadows were a delicate blue. A thin coat of ice crusted the puddles in the streets, and it was said on the day after Christmas that only ten miles to the north there was a light fall of snow. (p. 168)

Summer is the longest season in the South and it "always is burning hot." The advent of this summer was "different from any other time Mick could remember. Nothing much happened that she could describe to herself in thoughts or words--but there was a feeling of change." (p. 82) Jake Blount "hated this weather. He thought dizzily of the long, burning summer months ahead. He did not feel well." (p. 239) The foreboding and subdued violence of Jake and the changeableness of Mick reflect their characters in their attitudes toward the natural seasons.

Mrs. McCullers carefully records the passing seasons and the passage of time indicates the rapid physical changes in Mick's adolescence. Weather, seasonal change, and setting all figure symbolically in the episode of Mick's sexual initiation.

Like adolescence, southern winters are wildly unpredictable. A day of bone chilling dampness may be followed by warm sunshine which tempts every living creature to come out and begin anew. Such was the state of weather in the long, building episode which leads to Mick's sexual initiation. The setting contributes significantly to the insular force of this episode, beginning with the first faint stirrings of sexual response Mick and Harry felt when they playfully wrestled in the alley.

> It was a bright winter afternoon. The sky was blue-green and the branches of the oak trees in the back yard were black and bare against this color. The sun was warm. The day made her feel full of energy. (p. 209)

The setting for Mick and Harry's picnic suggests a virginal innocence in its isolation from society. The unpredictable weather had brought a March day which was unseasonably warm, and Mick and Harry were going swimming. "The morning was hot and sunny...the fields were bright green and the sharp smell of pine trees was in the air...the warm wind blew into their faces." (p. 229) The description of the picnic scene is idyllic.

> The woods were very quiet. Slick pine needles covered the ground. Within a few minutes they had reached the creek. The water was brown and swift. Cool. There was no sound except from the water and a breeze singing high up in the pine trees. It was like the deep, quiet woods made them timid, and they walked softly along the bank beside the creek. (p. 231)

In contrast with the timidity and innocence described above, the natural surroundings on their homeward journey were dingy and soiled.

> They dropped the bicycles and sat by a ditch beside the road. They sat far apart from each other. The late sun burned down on their heads and there were brown, crumbly ant beds all around them.
> ...An ant stung her on the ankle and she picked it up in her fingers, and looked at it very close.
> ...She dug a hole in the ground with her finger and buried the dead ant.
> ...Her eyes looked slowly around her--at the streaked red-and-white clay of the ditch, at the broken whiskey bottle, at a pine tree across from them with a sign advertising for a man for county sheriff.
> They were walking home again, pushing the wheels. Their shadows stretched out giant-sized on the road. Harry was bent over like an old beggar and kept wiping his nose on his sleeve. For a minute there was a bright, golden glow over everything before the sun sank down behind the trees and their shadows were gone on the road before them. (pp. 235, 236)

The importance of time indicated by frequent reference to weather and the seasons is also found in direct references to time throughout Carson McCullers' novels. Oliver Evans, in commenting on her preoccupation with time[7] has observed that the state of one's emotional or spiritual world is reflected in his attitude toward time. Mr. Evans says that to the unloved or unable-to-love one, time moves too slowly. He wants it to hasten so his loneliness can be ended. To the lover, time moves too swiftly; he cannot have his love long enough.[8]

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[7] It might be noted also that Carson McCuller's own father was a watchmaker, and the fathers of Mick Kelly and Frankie Addams were watchmakers; Singer also was a jeweler. Close examination of each of the novels illustrates Evans' thesis concerning the effects of time on the characters.

[8] Evans, op. cit., p. 307.

In The Heart is a Lonely Hunter time for John Singer without Antonapoulos is interminable. On his first visit to his friend, "It seemed to Singer that years had passed since they had been together." (p. 79) And later, "It was more than a year now since his friend had gone away. This year seemed neither long nor short. Rather it was removed from the ordinary sense of time--as when one is drunk or half-asleep. Behind each hour there was always his friend." (p. 170)

Just as time is symbolically significant to reflect Singer's moods and feelings, so time for Mick reflects her inability to clearly perceive the significance of things about her. On occasion, time eluded Mick. As she listened to the symphony, "This music did not take a long time or a short time. It did not have anything to do with time going by at all... It might have been five minutes she listened or half the night." (p. 100) When she and Harry stood naked before each other in the secluded woods, "Maybe it was half an hour they stood there--maybe not more than a minute." (p. 233) Time has escaped Mick's intellectual control just as events of her life seem fatefully beyond her control.

The opening paragraph of Reflections in a Golden Eye demonstrates the immediate sense of unity which Carson McCullers puts into her novels. The place, tone, mood and style are established immediately and are sustained throughout the novel.

> An army post in peacetime is a dull place. Things happen but then they happen over and over again. The general plan of a fort in itself adds to the monotony--the huge concrete barracks, the neat rows of officers' homes built one precisely like the other, the gym, the chapel, the golf course and the swimming pools--all is designed according to a certain rigid pattern. But perhaps the dullness of a post is caused most of all by insularity and by a surfeit of leisure and safety, for once a man enters the army he is expected only to follow the heels ahead of him. (p. 1)

Dayton Kohler, in referring to the opening paragraph of Reflections in a Golden Eye and the sense of inevitability it conveys wrote: "The pressure of the narrowed field makes for speed and concentration, and the reader has a feeling of powerlessness before this swift unfolding of physical violence and psychological horrors."[9]

Little more is said directly about the army post itself, but the tightly woven pattern of the characters' relationships with each other reflect its insularity and the inward confinement of the action.

Near the post is another setting that is crucial to the characters' development. The dense golden woods offer a retreat for the primitive sun rituals of Ellgee Williams, and to Captain Penderton they are the natural world which he must enter and conquer if he is ever to confront his existence with honesty. Williams, because he is a part of the woods, is simultaneously an enemy and a compelling attraction for the Captain. In the first episode of the novel Penderton is seeking to enhance nature by altering it. Williams cannot envision Penderton's plan, and he innocently mutilates the tree which he has been ordered to trim. In this event, the essential conflict between the two characters as they represent primitivism and intellectualism is enacted. Williams cannot intellectually perceive the Captain's desires, and his only response can be destruction.

The action of Reflections in a Golden Eye covers little more than a month. The autumn months of October and November are long, golden, and lingering. For the slow, half-conscious action, the season is perfectly chosen. Moreover, the autumn months are the dying months of summer's life. As Captain Penderton searches for a meaning for his life, as the rationality of Alison Langdon's life ebbs, as Leonora's physical body takes on

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[9]Kohler, op. cit., p. 420.

the full, rich heaviness of maturity, as Private Williams' half-conscious responses lead to his inevitable death--their former worlds close with the season.

The unity of setting is accomplished not by the locale of the army post and its enclosure of woods alone, but also by the blending of characters into the setting and season by the repeated use of autumn colors. The color descriptions used with the characters reinforce their close relationships to the action and setting. For example: Private Williams' eyes are a "curious blend of amber and brown" (p. 2), and his body is "a pale golden brown" (p. 46); Leonora has "bronze" hair (p. 5); Penderton has an "amber cigarette holder" (p. 21); Langdon has a "red-brown face" (p. 15); Anacleto wears a "burnt-orange jacket" (p. 39).

The golden tones are often captured in reflections of firelight. Leonora's face was "very rose" before the "bright gold and orange light of the fire." (p. 11) At a dinner party the "firelight reddened /Major Langdon's/ handsome face." (p. 24) Leonora's "fresh rosy face flamed" with anticipation. (p. 52) During the long evening when Anacleto painted the ghastly green peacock, "the room was filled with the rosy glow of the fire." (p. 75)[10]

Of all Carson McCullers' novels, The Member of the Wedding has the tightest structural unity. The action covers only three days, a single room, the kitchen, contains the heart of the action, and the mood and atmosphere of the action is unified by the constant, oppressive heat of dog days. Time seems arrested, then with languid movements of twilight it carries the characters through the last events they will ever share together. Again, the opening paragraph sets an unchanging mood:

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[10]It is interesting to note that the name of Leonora Penderton's horse Firebird combines two of the recurring images of the book--firelight and birds.

> In June the trees were bright dizzy green, but later the leaves darkened, and the town turned black and shrunken under the glare of the sun. At first Frankie walked around doing one thing and another. The sidewalks of the town were gray in the early morning and at night, but the noon sun put a glaze on them, so that the cement burned and glittered like glass. The sidewalks finally became too hot for Frankie's feet, ...and at home there was only Berenice Sadie Brown and John Henry West. The three of them sat at the kitchen table, saying the same things over and over, so that by August the words began to rhyme with each other and sound strange. The world seemed to die each afternoon and nothing moved any longer. At last the summer was like a green sick dream, or like a silent crazy jungle under glass. (p. 1)

The three days' action occurs the last weekend in August, the last weekend of Frankie's miserable summer. It was the season of dog days.

> And the season of dog days is like this: it is the time at the end of the summer when as a rule nothing can happen--but if a change does come about, that change remains until dog days are over. Things that are done are not undone and a mistake once made is not corrected.
>
> That August Berenice scratched a mosquito bite under her right arm and it became a sore: that sore would never heal until dog days were over. Two little families of August gnats picked out the corner of John Henry's eyes to settle down in, and though he often shook himself and blinked, those gnats were there to stay. (p. 28)

The static time is caught in the dog days. Oliver Evans' time theory is seen in Frankie who, at first because she is miserable, then later because she is impatient, finds time interminable. Throughout the long day of the principal action, time stretches, blurs, and tends to distort images. When Frankie is running through the town telling the wedding story, it is suddenly noon. The description of downtown is one of static death-ness.

> The clock in the tower of the First Baptist Church clanged twelve, the mill whistle sounded. There was a drowsing quietness about the street, and even the very cars, parked slantwise with their noses toward the center aisle of grass, were like exhausted cars that have all gone to sleep. The few people out at the noon hour kept close beneath the blunt shade of the awnings. The sun took the color from the sky and the brick stores seemed shrunken, dark, beneath the glare--one building had an overhanging cornice at the top which, from a distance, gave it a queer look of a brick building that has begun to melt. (p. 61)

Twilight of the same day comes in lengthening, dream-like tones.

> The twilight was white, and it lasted for a long while. Time in August could be divided into four parts: morning, afternoon, twilight, and dark. At twilight the sky became a curious blue-green which soon faded to white. The air was soft gray, and the arbor and trees were slowly darkening. It was the hour when sparrows gathered and whirled above the rooftops of the town, and when in the darkened elms along the street there was the August sound of the cicadas. Noises at twilight had a blurred sound, and they lingered: the slam of a screen door down the street, voices of children, the whir of a lawnmower from a yard somewhere. (p. 106)

The carefully drawn twilight hour extends the mood of the last slow, building climactic scene of the long summer afternoons.

> It was the hour when the shapes in the kitchen darkened and voices bloomed. They spoke softly and their voices bloomed like flowers. --if sounds can be like flowers and voices bloom. (p. 109)

The kitchen contains the twilight, the heat of dog days, the flickering changes of light and mood; the clock ticks slowly there.

> The kitchen was a sad and ugly room. John Henry had covered the walls with queer, child drawings, as far up as his arm could reach. This gave the kitchen a crazy look, like that of a room in the crazy-house. And now the old kitchen made Frankie sick. (p. 4)

> The walls of the kitchen bothered Frankie--the queer drawings of Christmas trees, airplanes, freak soldiers, flowers. John Henry had started the first pictures one long afternoon in June, and having already ruined the wall, he went on and drew whenever he wished. Sometimes Frankie had drawn also. At first her father had been furious about the walls, but later he said for them to draw all the pictures out of their systems, and he would have the kitchen painted in the fall. But as the summer lasted, and would not end, the walls had begun to bother Frankie. That evening the kitchen looked strange to her, and she was afraid. (p. 7)

Because of its dreamlike or legendary quality, the realism of the setting is not as strong in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe as in Mrs. McCullers' earlier novels. Rather, the action seems suspended and isolated within the walls of a ghost-cafe. As in her previous books, the mood of the story is established in the opening description of the setting.

> The town itself is dreary; not much is there except the cotton mill, the two-room houses where the workers live, a few peach trees, a church with two colored windows, and a miserable main street only a hundred yards long. On Saturdays the tenants from the near-by farms come in for a day of talk and trade. Otherwise the town is lonesome, sad, and like a place that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world...The winters here are short and raw, the summers white with glare and fiery hot. (p. 3)

The concluding paragraph of the book, a duplication of the one given above, reinforces the isolation and insularity of the setting. But between the somber settings of the opening and closing scene, a warm glow briefly penetrates the grey dullness of the town's existence. Cousin Lymon came in the spring of the year to Miss Amelia's, and with him came the germinating idea of a cafe. To comfort and amuse Lymon, Miss Amelia made her store a cafe.

The establishment of the cafe allows Mrs. McCullers to make her most direct statement about the necessity for human relationships. The needs which a cafe fulfills are seen in people's altered behavior and their brief realization of human worth. The altered atmosphere which changes people's behavior is described thus:

> Even the richest, greediest old rascal will behave himself, insulting no one in a proper cafe. And poor people look about them gratefully and pinch up the salt in a dainty and modest manner. For the atmosphere of a proper cafe implies these qualities: fellowship, the satisfactions of the belly, and a certain gaiety and grace of behavior. This had never been told to the gathering in Miss Amelia's store that night. But they knew it of themselves, although never, of course, until that time had there been a cafe in the town. (p. 23)

But "Why was the cafe so precious to this town?" the narrator inquires. The answer lies in

> ...a certain pride that had not hitherto been known in these parts. To understand this new pride the cheapness of human life must be kept in mind. There were always plenty of people clustered around a mill--but it was seldom that every family had enough meal, garments, and fat back to go the rounds. Life could become one long

> dim scramble just to get the things needed to keep alive. And the confusing point is this: All useful things have a price, and are bought only with money, as that is the way the world is run. You know without having to reason about it the price of a bale of cotton, or a quart of molasses. But no value has been put on human life; it is given to us free and taken without being paid for. What is it worth? If you look around, at times the value may seem to be little or nothing at all. Often after you have sweated and tried and things are not better for you, there comes a feeling deep down in the soul that you are not worth much.
>
> But the new pride that the cafe brought to this town had an effect on almost everyone, even the children... The people in the town were...proud when sitting at the tables in the cafe. They washed before coming to Miss Amelia's, and scraped their feet very politely on the threshold as they entered the cafe. There, for a few hours at least, the deep bitter knowing that you are not worth much in this world could be laid low. (p. 55)

The symbol of the cafe is that of spiritual union. It provides a place for recognition of human worth in association with other human beings. In the overall view of Carson McCullers' theme of loneliness, the cafe and the miracles of awareneness that blossom there, the momentary stays against loneliness that are found there, represent a microcosm of man's search for identity in his world--an identity which cannot be found in himself alone, and which he is able to find in others only temporarily.

Amelia Evans knew love briefly and was happy in it; the people of the town knew friendship and their human worth briefly and were happy for it. But both were transitory states and when Miss Amelia's love was killed, the town receded again into its lethargy that was sad as death.

> Yes, the town is dreary. On August afternoons the road is empty, white with dust, and the sky above is bright as glass. Nothing moves--there are no children's voices, only the hum of the mill. The peach trees seem to grow more crooked every summer, and the leaves are dull gray and of a sickly delicacy. The house of Miss Amelia leans so much to the right that it is now only a question of time when it will collapse completely, and people are careful not to walk around the yard. There is no good liquor to be bought in the town; the nearest still is eight miles away, and the liquor is such that those who drink it grow warts on their livers the size of goobers,

> and dream themselves into a dangerous inward world. There is absolutely nothing to do in the town. Walk around the millpond, stand kicking at a rotten stump, figure out what you can do with the old wagon wheel by the side of the road near the church. The soul rots with boredom. You might as well go down to the Forks Falls highway and listen to the chain gang. (p. 70)

Six years passed in the total action of The Ballad of the Sad Cafe but only the beginning and ending episodes of that time were related in detail. In each episode the seasons and weather provide more than casual background. Cousin Lymon appears on a warm spring night full of promise for the coming season.

> It was toward midnight on a soft quiet evening in April. The sky was the color of a blue swarm iris, the moon clear and bright. The crops that spring promised well and in the past weeks the mill had run a night shift. (p. 5)

And the season's promise was fulfilled for Lymon as the seed of Amelia's love grew and flourished for six years.

The wrestling match between Amelia and Marvin Macy occurred on Ground Hog Day, February 2, but preparation for this climactic event was made far in advance. Miss Amelia heard about Marvin's release from prison on a hot August night filled with foreboding.

> ...the sky had burned above the town like a sheet of flame all day. Now the green twilight was near and there was a feeling of repose. The street was coated an inch deep with dry golden dust and the little children about half-naked, sneezed often, sweated, and were fretful. (p. 38)

But autumn soon arrived and the pace quickened.

> That autumn was a happy time. The crops around the countryside were good, and over at the Forks Falls market the price of tobacco held firm that year. After the long hot summer the first cool days had a clean bright sweetness.

There is none of the lingering, static autumn of Reflections in a Golden Eye, but a vigorous preparation for a greater challenge in winter.

> During these weeks there was a quality about Miss Amelia that many people noticed. She laughed often, with a deep ringing laugh, and her whistling had a sassy, tuneful trickery. She was forever trying out her strength, lifting up heavy objects, or poking her tough biceps with her finger.

These are not idly recorded actions, but each one associated with the vigorous autumn season points to preparation for the reckoning day in winter.

Marvin Macy arrived in town the first day of hog killing. And immediately the industry of autumn was thwarted.

> Marvin Macy brought with him bad fortune, right from the first, as could be expected. The next day the weather turned suddenly, and it became hot. Even in the early morning there was a sticky sultriness in the atmosphere, the wind carried the rotten smell of the swamp, and delicate shrill mosquitoes webbed the green millpond. It was unseasonable, worse than August, and much damage was done. (p. 51)

The winter that Marvin Macy returned was memorable for another event to which he also laid claim. It snowed. For the townspeople, such an event was awesome and portentous. Its effects on them were varied, and their reactions are catalogued in some detail.[11] Ignorant little children cried, the minister tried to work it into his sermon, Miss Amelia pretended it was not there, Lymon was ecstatic, and Marvin Macy boasted that his presence had brought the phenomenon.

> Most people were humble and glad about this marvel; they spoke in hushed voices and said 'thank you' and 'please' more than was necessary. A few weak characters, of course, were demoralized and got drunk--but they were not numerous. To everyone this was an occasion and many counted their money and planned to go to the cafe that night. (p. 59)

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[11] A special fascination with snow runs through all of Mrs. McCullers' novels, but this is the only one in which it actually appears. As Frank Baldanza points out, in the limited, inland Southern setting which McCullers uses, "...having seen either the sea or snow is a personal distinction of considerable weight."

In keeping with the folk quality of The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, the appearance of the snow is significant. In the folk tradition a clash between giants is regularly preceded by great and ominous signs in nature. Thus, the contest between Amelia and Marvin is naturally preceded by ominous natural signs. Marvin was quick to lay claim to the phenomenon, but Amelia's orderly world was shattered. Her helplessness against Marvin and Lymon is illustrated in her reaction to the snow. She boarded the house against the snow and tried to ignore it because "...if she admitted this snowfall she would have to come to some decision, and in those days there was enough distraction in her life as it was already." (p. 58)

Another detail of symbolic setting which occurs in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is the pattern of twisted images which runs throughout the book. Miss Amelia's house itself "leans so far to the right that it seems bound to collapse at any minute...There is about it a curious, cracked look..." (p. 3) As Amelia led Lymon upstairs for the first time, "The hunchback hovered so close behind her that the swinging light made on the staircase wall one great, twisted shadow of the two of them." (p. 12)

One of the most striking images is that of the dark, twisted peach trees hovering in the background. Cousin Lymon's first appearance in the novel is made in the same paragraph with the first mention of the trees.

> The approaching figure was still too distant to be clearly seen. The mood made dim, twisted shadows of the blossoming peach trees along the side of the road. In the air the odor of the blossoms and sweet spring grass mingled with the warm, sour smell of the nearby lagoon. (p. 6)

The trees were familiar landmarks in the town. They had been there ten years earlier when Amelia had been married, but then "...the peach trees along the street were more crooked and smaller than they are now." (p. 27)

On the hot August evening when news of Marvin Macy's return was first mentioned, "The moonlight brightened the dusty road, and the dwarfed peach trees were black and motionless: there was no breeze." (p. 41) In the concluding paragraph the town is dreary again. "The peach trees seem to grow more crooked every summer, and the leaves are dull gray and of a sickly delicacy." (p. 70)

The atmosphere of brooding disaster which is established in the opening paragraphs of The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is not unrelieved in the novel, but the subdued images of twisted shadow, peach trees, rotten stumps, and poison swamp lilies maintain the underlying terror which rests in the heart of man's loneliness. It is in the fine detail of construction which unifies setting with character and theme that Carson McCullers' best narrative powers are revealed.

In Clock Without Hands, Milan, Georgia, is essentially the same city that is found in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter and The Member of the Wedding. However, unlike the two earlier novels, there is no smaller, more unified setting within the general framework of the southern city. Oliver Evans has observed that there is more surface-level interest in the plot of Mrs. McCullers' last novel, as well as more surface-level characterization.[7] Likewise, the external setting of Clock Without Hands is not explored for deeper or symbolic meaning. The social attitudes of Milan are crucial to the plot in that J. T. Malone and Jester must overcome them in order to find their own identities, but in a description of Milan it is made very clear that Jester does not feel a part of his environment.

> Tipped panama hats, the separate fountains for white and colored people in the courthouse square, the trough and hitching post for mules, muslin and white linen and raggedy overalls. Milan. Milan. Milan.

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[7]Evans, op. cit., p. 306

> Some people were content to live their mortal lives and die and be buried in Milan. Jester Clane was not one of those. Maybe a minority of one, but a definitely not one. (p. 91)

The separateness from his environment which Jester feels, Malone's dissatisfaction with everything about his life in Milan, the racial barrier which prevents Sherman from ever being accepted in Milan society, and the Judge's blind support of all its hypocrisies, push the counterfeit society itself into the background and it is replaced with emphasis on time and seasonal change.

As the title implies, a major concern of the novel is with time. J. T. Malone was like a man watching a "clock without hands" as he awaited his death. For him, time was at first confusing, then vital, and finally, unimportant. The opening sentence of the novel reads:

> Death is always the same, but each man dies in his own way. For J. T. Malone it began in such a simple ordinary way that for a time he confused the end of life with the beginning of a new season. (p. 1)

Spring that year held no promise for J. T. After learning of his imminent death, he withdrew from the physical world and in the early months of his illness he recognized few of the changes about him. "He had lost the summer that year; the vegetables had grown and been eaten unnoticed. The hard blaze of summer shriveled his spirit." (p. 108) "As he walked he felt the blazing sky, the sun, weigh down his shoulders," (p. 115) but he daydreamed of autumn and a journey to the north where he would see snow.

Malone became more and more conscious of time. He took his watch to Herman Klein, the jeweler:

> 'This watch loses about two minutes every week,' he said pettishly to the jeweler. 'I demand that my watch keep strict railroad time.' For in the limbo of waiting for death, Malone was obsessed with time. He was always deviling the jeweler, complaining that his watch was two minutes too slow or three minutes too fast. (p. 187)

It was only after the redemption of his moral soul in his refusal to bomb Sherman's house, and in the gradual approach of death that J. T. could align himself with time and nature.

> He no longer confused the end of life with the beginning of a new season...Yes, the earth had revolved its seasons and spring had come again. But there was no longer a revulsion against nature, against things. A strange lightness had come upon his soul and he exalted. He looked at nature now and it was part of himself. He was no longer a man watching a clock without hands. He was not alone, he did not rebel, he did not suffer. He did not even think of death these days. He was not a man dying...nobody died, everybody died. (p. 211)

The lack of emphasis on setting in Clock Without Hands reflects the characters' disassociation with their environment. But because Mrs. McCullers is more concerned with surface-level action in this novel, it is necessary that a resolution be made with society. It is significant, therefore, that after Jester has found his place and purpose in the world, and after J. T. Malone has reconciled himself with nature and the seasons, that the setting should be suddenly brought into a perspective. This occurs in a crucial closing scene in which Jester, from his airplane soaring over the city, realizes that "Looking downward from an altitude of two thousand feet, the earth assumes order. A town, even Milan, is symmetrical, exact as a small gray honeycomb, complete." (p. 208)

CHAPTER V

SYMBOLIC PLOT

Man's search, which forms the basic pattern for all Carson McCullers' novels, may be a quest for his own identity or a search against the inevitable loneliness of the human spirit. Man's search takes several forms in the body of Mrs. McCullers' work: he may seek a god, or he may test himself against natural forces; he may seek a "we" association against his loneliness; he may find an outlandish object for his love, or he may associate himself with his society. But however man seeks, and whatever comfort he may find, Mrs. McCullers offers him no permanent peace. Every stay against loneliness is a temporary one and in no love can a reciprocal value be guaranteed. Why must man's answer be only a temporary one? Can there ever be an answer in the knowledge and life of man? The symbolic references of Carson McCullers' plots may provide her answers to these questions. The development of her themes throughout the body of her work shows a partial resolution of love and loneliness in the external world, but a decline in her narrative powers in her last novel makes this resolution less than satisfying.

When Carson McCullers wrote The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, she called it "a parable in modern form," and described it as "the story of Fascism" presenting "the spiritual rather than the political side of that phenomenon."[1] A political interpretation may have been more apparent to the readers in 1940,

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[1] Frank Durham, "God and No God in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter," South Atlantic Quarterly, LVI (1957), 494.

but current readers will probably find the Fascist implications of secondary importance. Frank Durham describes The Heart is a Lonely Hunter as "an ironic religious allegory employed to reinforce the author's concept of the discreteness of human beings, not just from each other, but from God Himself."[2] As a religious allegory, the burden of proof is so strong as to be undeniable, and the irony is that men, in their efforts to create their own god-images, are faced with inevitable futility for their efforts.

The religious allegory in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter can be explained by several separate devices which Mrs. McCullers employs. Examination of the following characteristics point to the allegory: The physical characteristics of Singer; the Biblical allusions related to him; Singer's own actions; the other characters' interpretations of what Singer is; the dream; and Antonapoulos' position in the overall structure of the theme.

Physically, the "brooding peace" (p. 9) of Singer's "gentle and Jewish" (p. 114) face, the "eyes that seemed to understand all," (p. 59), and the inherent knowledge of all things which he seemed to possess, all connote the familiar Christ-image. Moreover, the long conversations in Singer's upstairs room assume the characteristics of a confessional. When his guests arrived, "Singer was always the same to everyone. He sat in a straight chair by the window with his hands stuffed tight into his pockets, and nodded or smiled to show his guests that he understood." (p. 79) For his visitors, their visits provided a serenity they were unable to find elsewhere. When Jake Blount came to Singer, "Often his voice would come out loud and angry from the room. But before he left his voice gradually quieted. When he descended the stairs...he walked away thoughtfully without seeming to notice where he was going." (p. 78) The suggestion of a confessional appears also in Singer's presenting his guests with water, wine,

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[2]Ibid., p. 494.

and food, of which he took a small part himself. Another striking image of these "confessionals" is that of Singer standing in the doorway, bidding Jake farewell: "He left the mute standing in the doorway with his hands still in his pockets and the half-smile on his face. When he had gone down several steps of the stairs he turned and waved." (p. 48)

A significant Bible text is introduced early in the novel, directly following the meeting of Singer and Blount. Biff Brannon hears his wife reading aloud in preparation for the junior department Sunday school lesson:

> And Jesus said unto them, 'Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.' And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him...and in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed to a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with Him followed after Him. And when they had found Him, they said unto Him, 'All men seek for Thee.' (p. 26)

The text, "All men seek for Thee," revolved in Biff's mind as he tried to explain the curious behavior of Jake Blount as he "...gravitated around the deaf-mute and picked him out and tried to make him a free present of everything in him." (p. 27) Thus began Biff's quest for the answer to the riddle of Singer and his relation to other people. "Why?" he asks while still musing on the Bible text.

> Because in some men it is in them to give up everything personal at some time, before it ferments and poisons--throw it to some human being or some human idea. They have to. In some men it is in them--The text is 'All men seek for Thee.' Maybe that was why--maybe--(p. 27)

Biblical overtones continue throughout the novel, and the rhythm and structure of two passages are particularly suggestive of Biblical verse. They both describe the effect of Singer on people around the town, casual strangers who spread rumors that assume epic proportion.

> Now it came about that various rumors started in the town concerning the mute. In the years before with Antonapoulos they had walked back and forth to work, but except for this they were always alone together in their

> rooms. No one had bothered about them then--and if they were observed it was the big Greek on whom attention was focused. The Singer of those years was forgotten.
>
> So the rumors about the mute were rich and varied. The Jews said that he was a Jew. The merchants along the main street claimed that he received a large legacy and was a very rich man. It was whispered in one brow-beaten textile union that the mute was an organizer for the C. I. O. A lone Turk who had roamed into the town years ago and who languished with his family behind a little store where they sold linens claimed passionately to his wife that the mute was Turkish. He said that when he spoke his language the mute understood. And as he claimed this his voice grew warm and he forgot to squabble with his children and he was full of plans and activity. One old man from the country said that the mute had come from somewhere near his home and that the mute's father had the finest tobacco crop in all the country. All these things were said about him. (p. 170)

> During the moonlit January nights Singer continued to walk about the streets of the town each evening when he was not engaged. The rumors about him grew bolder. An old Negro woman told hundreds of people that he knew the ways of spirits come back from the dead. A certain piece-worker claimed that he had worked with the mute at another mill elsewhere in the state--and the tales he told were unique. The rich thought that he was rich and the poor considered him a poor man like themselves. And as there was no way to disprove these rumors they grew marvelous and very real. Each man described the mute as he wished him to be. (p. 190)

Further indication of Singer as a Christ-figure is shown in the other characters' direct associations of him with God in their minds. For instance, when Jake Blount is thinking of Singer, the word Christ is used repeatedly. In the violent concluding scene in which Jake Blount is plunged into a gang fight at the carnival, his reactions are mixed with the blurred realizations that "...this was the finish. A brawl. A riot. A fight with every man for himself." (p. 287) In the paragraph describing his reactions to this brawl, the word Christ! (used as an exclamation) appears four times. Reality sank into Jake's conscious mind. Then in a swift succession of events, these thoughts and images are mingled: "He stood watching for about five seconds before he pushed into the crowd. In that short time he

thought of many things. He thought of Singer." (p. 288) Then he ran from the carnival park: "In his confusion he had run all the way across the town to reach the room of his friend. And Singer was dead. He began to cry....A wall, a flight of stairs, a road ahead." (p. 290) Then he saw this message written in purple chalk on a tall board fence:

> He Died to Save You
> Hear the Story of His Love and Grace
> Every Nite 7:15 P.M. (p. 290)

In the opening scene of the novel, the drunken Jake had beat his head and fists on a brick wall; then he found Singer and his violence subsided. Now he was before the wall again, but instead of beating it he chose the open road. In the repeated phrase, "A wall, a flight of stairs, an open road," Jake's behavior pattern is summarized, and intimately connected with these images are thoughts of Singer and the Bible text, "He died to save you."

From the other characters in the novel (with the exception of Biff Brannon) Singer also received a Christ-like devotion. Dr. Copeland found that in Singer there was "truly none of the quiet insolence about this man" that he encountered in so many white men. The god-image which Mick found in Singer is stated directly. After hearing the Beethoven Symphony, Mick was overwhelmed and afraid. She wanted to turn to something larger than herself.

> She whispered some words out loud: 'Lord forgiveth me, for I knoweth not what I do.' Why did she think of that? Everybody in the past few years knew there wasn't any real God. When she thought of what she used to imagine was God she could only see Mister Singer with a long, white sheet around him. She said the words again, just as she would speak them to Mister Singer: 'Lord forgiveth me, for I knoweth not what I do.' (pp. 101, 102)

Biff Brannon is the observer who seeks explanations for other people's actions. His visits to Singer's room are brief and he is without the

worshipful attitude of the others. Instead, he puzzles over what Singer had become to them. A revelation of the haunting riddle of Singer comes to him suddenly as he sees Blount and Singer enter and leave his cafe. As they walked, "Blount followed along just behind his elbow." And suddenly Biff remembered that in days past, when Antonapoulos and Singer were together, it was always the fat Greek who led and Singer who followed. With this memory,

> Biff narrowed his eyes. How Singer had been before was not important. The thing that mattered was the way Blount and Mick made of him a sort of home-made God. Owing to the fact that he was a mute they were able to give him all the qualities they wanted him to have. Yes. But how could such a strange thing come about? And why? (p. 198)

Biff never knew why, even after Singer's death. He felt, "There was something not natural about it all--something like an ugly joke." (p. 306)

Biff's feeling of the "ugly joke" is intensified for the reader who is aware of the intense devotion of Singer to Antonapoulos. The irony of the Greek's relationship to Singer is the key to the futility and inadequacy of man's search for a god which seems to be implied in the novel.

Frank Durham suggests that Antonapoulos represents the old pagan gods on whom the Christian God is dependent. He compares Antonapoulos to the classical god as being "whimsical, selfish, scandalous, sensual, and at the same time capable of seeming wise, of bringing consolation and reassurance to his devotee."[3] He cites the occasion of Singer's second visit to Antonapoulos at the mental hospital. The Greek was arrayed in gaudy finery, all gifts from Singer.

> He wore a scarlet dressing-gown and green silk pajamas and a turquoise ring. His skin was a pale yellow color, his eyes very dreamy and dark. His black hair was touched at the temples with silver. (p. 187)

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[3]Ibid., p. 499.

Around his neck, a red ribbon replaced the dirty string of the little brass cross which he always wore. When the nurse straightened the covers on his bed, "...the big Greek inclined his head so deliberately that the gesture seemed one of benediction rather than a simple nod of thanks." (p. 188)

During these visits to the hospital, Singer performs acts of obeisance to Antonapoulos. He brings him expensive gifts (offerings), and the confessional ritual which is acted out in Singer's room is recreated at Antonapoulos' bedside. Singer's hands talk frantically for him as "Eagerly Singer leaned closer and he breathed with long, deep breaths and in his eyes there were bright tears." (p. 188) Once, years before, Singer "had made a pledge to Antonapoulos (and even written it on a paper and tacked it on the wall above his bed)--a pledge that he would give up cigarettes, beer and meat for one month." (p. 174) The reason for this sacrifice is not disclosed, but it is clearly some kind of tribute he was giving to his friend.

The hierarchical relationship of the six main characters in the book is illustrated in a symbolic dream which Singer has. The dream follows two episodes which prepare well for the dream. First, Blount, Copeland, Mick and Biff, who previously had come to Singer's room separately, met there simultaneously. When this occurred, Singer expected "...an outburst of some kind. In a vague way he had expected this to be the end of something. But in the room there was only the feeling of strain." Later, Singer tried to establish some kind of explanation for the unusual behavior of the people. In a letter which he wrote to Antonapoulos, Singer reveals for the first time the confusion and misunderstanding which exists in his mind concerning his guests. He thinks Blount is crazy. "He thinks he and I have a secret together but I do not know what it is." He likes Mick, but says, "I wish I knew what it is she hears. She knows I am deaf but

she thinks I know about music." Of Copeland, he writes, "This black man frightens me sometimes." (p. 183) Singer concludes his letter to the Greek by saying, "The way I need you is a loneliness I cannot bear...I am not meant to be alone and without you who understand." (pp. 184, 185)

The direct succession of these episodes emphasizes the relationship of the four characters to each other and to Singer and it underscores the irony of their positions in revealing Singer's relationship to them and to Antonapoulos. The dream presents their positions even more succinctly:

> Out of the blackness of sleep a dream formed. There were dull yellow lanterns lighting up a dark flight of stone steps. Antonapoulos kneeled at the top of these steps. He was naked and cold and he fumbled with something that he held above his head and gazed at it as though in prayer. He himself knelt halfway down the steps. He was naked and cold and he could not take his eyes from Antonapoulos and the thing he held above him. Behind him on the ground he felt the one with the mustache and the girl and the black man and the last one. They knelt naked and he felt their eyes on him. And behind them there were uncounted crowds of kneeling people in the darkness. His own hands were huge windmills and he stared fascinated at the unknown thing that Antonapoulos held. The yellow lanterns swayed to and fro in the darkness and all else was motionless. Then suddenly there was a ferment. In the upheaval the steps collapsed and he felt himself falling downward. He awoke with a jerk. The early light whitened the window. He felt afraid. (p. 185)

When Antonapoulos died (the "fall" in the dream) Singer plunged after him. Ihab Hassan has described Mrs. McCullers' theme in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter as "the spectacle of a love forever seeking its own denial."[4] Hassan sees Singer as the only true lover in the book; the others are essentially selfish, as demonstrated in their inability to communicate with each other in Singer's room.

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[4]Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary Novel (Princeton, 1961), p. 210.

After Singer's suicide, his "disciples"--Mick, Blount, and Copeland--naturally grieve, but they do not succumb. Copeland's death is imminent, but it is from natural causes; Mick's "death" is a spiritual one of loss of youth and hope; Blount leaves town, but "There was hope in him, and soon perhaps the outline of his journey would take form." (p. 299) Biff remains relatively unchanged, but the riddle of Singer rests heavily on him.

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter was Carson McCullers' first novel, and it contains the germs of her basic ideas which are refined and developed more forcefully in her later novels, particularly The Member of the Wedding and The Ballad of the Sad Cafe. Mick's search for knowledge and assurance of a place in the world is directed with more intensity on Frankie in The Member of the Wedding; Blount's and Copeland's need for social identification receives more specific treatment in Clock Without Hands; and Singer's inexplicable love for the outlandish Greek receives its strongest explanation in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe. In all of Carson McCullers' novels, the essential loneliness of man, the search for meaning and belonging in the world, and the hopeless incommunication and lack of understanding symbolized by the deaf-mutes in The Heart is a Lonely Hunter are recurring themes which make all of her works seem a unified pattern in carefully woven tapestry.

Tennessee Williams has written in a preface to Reflections in a Golden Eye that Mrs. McCullers' "...first novel had a tendency to overflow in places as if the virtuosity of the young writer had not yet fallen under her entire control. But in the second there is an absolute mastery of design...it exhibits the one attribute which had yet to be shown in Carson McCullers' stunning array of gifts: the gift of mastery over a youthful lyricism." (p. xv) Mr. Williams further asserts that:

> Reflections in a Golden Eye is one of the purest and most powerful of those works which are conceived in the Sense of The Awful which is the desperate black root of nearly all significant modern art, from the Guernica of Picasso to the cartoons of Charles Addams. (p. xiv)

After such effusive praise for his friend's book, Mr. Williams goes on to say that he thinks her later works, The Member of the Wedding and The Ballad of the Sad Cafe are actually better. There are no scenes in Reflections in a Golden Eye that "assault the heart so mercilessly" as do some from her other novels. The austere objectivity of the point of view in Reflections in a Golden Eye engenders little sympathy for the characters. These qualities, combined with the lack of a satisfactory resolvement in the main character, leave a reader with a feeling of vague dissatisfaction. Lack of resolvement need not in itself weaken a novel, but here a resolution was so carefully prepared for in Penderton's ride through the forest that his inability to make one is a disappointment.

The details of Penderton's ride are catalogued in careful, graphic order. Upon arriving at the stables that afternoon, he called for Firebird to be saddled instead of the usual gentler horse. As the horse was brought around, "the Captain looked in the horse's round, purple eyes and saw there a liquid image of his own frightened face." (p. 56) During the ride Penderton allowed the horse to gallop unchecked; then he would suddenly and sharply reign him in. The correspondence between this peculiar action and the captain's life is suggested in the paragraph below:

> This procedure was repeated twice. The Captain gave Firebird his head long enough for the joy of freedom to be aroused and then checked him without warning. This sort of behavior was not new to the Captain. Often in his life he had exacted many strange and secret little penances on himself which he would have found difficult to explain to others. (p. 57)

Such foolhardy action naturally led to disaster. The horse swerved from the trail and plunged through the thick woods. The captain's face was

lashed by branches, and as he clung desperately to Firebird's mane, three words were in his heart: 'I am lost.' (p. 59)

> And having given up life, the Captain suddenly began to live. A great mad joy surged through him. This emotion, coming as unexpectedly as the plunge of the horse when he had broken away, was one that the Captain had never experienced. His eyes were glassy and half-open, as in delirium, but he saw suddenly as he had never seen before. The world was a kaleidoscope, and each of the multiple visions which he saw impressed itself on his mind with burning vividness. On the ground half-buried in the leaves there was a little flower, dazzling white and beautifully wrought...The Captain knew no terror now; he had soared to that rare level of consciousness where the mystic feels that the earth is he and that he is the earth. (p. 60)

The horse at last exhausted itself, and Penderton, his visionary ecstasy now departed, dismounted, tied the horse to a tree and beat it savagly, so that it seemed that "...in one afternoon the horse /had/ changed from a thoroughbred to a plug fit for the plow." (p. 62)

Penderton "sank down on the ground and lay in a curious position with his head in his arms. /He/ looked like a broken doll that has been thrown away." (p. 61) He lost consciousness, and upon awakening met the stare of Private Williams, who was standing naked in the forest, gazing at him with "...vague, impersonal eyes as though looking at some insect he had never seen before." (p. 62) No word was spoken, but the naked soldier led Firebird away and the Captain was flooded with a "rush of hatred for the soldier that was as exorbitant as the joy he had experienced on runaway Firebird...In his heart the Captain knew that this hatred, passionate as love, would be with him all the remaining days of his life." (p. 63)

Captain Penderton had before been too cowardly to respond fully to his emotions. But after the ride, he was overcome by his response to Private Williams. "How his annoyance could have grown to hate, and the hate to this diseased obsession, the Captain could not logically understand." (p. 95) However, thinking about these recent events made him feel

uncomfortable, so "he made no real effort to force himself to an inward reckoning." (p. 82) It is here, in the Captain's continued failure to recognize himself, after the careful preparation that was given by the wild ride, that the reader feels some inadequacy in development.

Once, after Alison's death and Anacleto's disappearance, Major Langdon, filled with recrimination, was talking about how the army could have changed and helped Anacleto. He said, "'In the army they would have run him ragged and he would have been miserable, but even that seems to me better than the other.'" (p. 99) The conversation continues:

> 'You mean," Captain Penderton said, 'that any fulfillment obtained at the expense of normalcy is wrong, and should not be allowed to bring happiness. In short, it is better, because it is morally honorable, for the square peg to keep scraping about the round hole rather than to discover and use the unorthodox square that would fit it.'
>
> 'Why, you put it exactly right,' the Major said. 'Don't you agree with me?'
>
> 'No,' said the Captain, after a short pause. With gruesome vividness the Captain suddenly looked into his soul and saw himself. For once he did not see himself as others saw him: there came to him a distorted doll-like image, mean of countenance and grotesque in form. (p. 99)

And again the Captain approaches a recognition of himself.

Tortured as he was by the presence of the young soldier, Penderton gradually "ceased to attribute his feelings for Private Williams to hate... He thought of the soldier in terms neither of love nor hate; he was conscious only of the irresistible yearning to break down the barrier between them." (p. 104)

The Captain's nameless feeling was never resolved, and the growth of his awareness of self was aborted by the sudden murder of Private Ellgee Williams. The action is brought abruptly to the inevitable and fateful close indicated in the first paragraph of the novel. Penderton, whose character has undergone only vestiges of change in his relation to others,

sees more clearly what he is to himself--but at the end he is unable to relate his knowledge to the world he lives in.

The symbolic interpretation of Reflections in a Golden Eye rests heavily on the natures of the characters involved. As Frank Baldanza pointed out in his very succinct pairing of the character types involved--the animalistic and the spiritual lovers--the major theme of the novel hinges on these two different kinds of love. He mentions that spiritual love is exalted "at the expense of sensual love"[5] in Reflections in a Golden Eye. In this kind of reading, Penderton, who represents the humanistic potential in man's spiritual love, loses his own soul when he destroys Nature, which is represented by Williams. Nature, in Williams, in Firebird, and in the forest, has shown Penderton the meaning of his life, but in murdering Williams, he refuses and destroys that which would have been his salvation.

Oliver Evans, in discussing the balance between realism and allegory in Carson McCullers' novels, says that only the very greatest artists can succeed in creating interesting, believable characters at the same time they are concerned primarily with allegorical meaning. As examples of this achievement, Evans cites Billy Budd, Hester Prynne, and Frankie Addams.[6] Frankie, with her own symbol of the door, represents all youth as they stand on the threshold between childhood to maturity. But more than that, she embodies all men who search for meaning--and in her twelfth year, Frankie begins the journey of discovery toward the meaning of love and of being.

Her discovery began in the spring when many things made her "suddenly wish to cry." (p. 22)

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[5] Baldanza, op. cit., p. 158.

[6] Evans, op. cit., p. 303.

> Things she had never noticed much before began to hurt her: home light watched from the evening sidewalks, an unknown voice from an alley. She would stare at the lights and listen to the voice, and something inside her stiffened and waited. But the lights would darken, the voice would fall silent, and though she waited, that was all. She was afraid of these things that made her suddenly wonder who she was, and what she was going to be in the world, and why she was standing at that minute, seeing a light, or listening, or staring up into the sky: alone. She was afraid, and there was a queer tightness in her chest. (p. 22)

Then "Her squeezed heart suddenly opened and divided. Her heart divided like two wings." (p. 42) She had found her identity in the wedding, and she knew where she was going--with her brother and his bride. Imperfect as her dream was, it nevertheless led Frankie to the greater knowledge which was to be her eventual saving.

After allying herself with the wedding, one of Frankie's first reactions to this new feeling of belonging was to experience a strange and mystical "connection" with people. Earlier she had associated this feeling with the freaks at the Fair. "...it had seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with her, as though to say: we know you." (p. 18) But the day she ran through the town she did not fear the connection as she had with the freaks. She saw a colored man, a lady going into a store, and a friend of her father's, and in their glances she felt "...a new unnamable connection, as though they were known to each other." (p. 50)

The oneness of man to each other, be he freak, stranger, or a loved one, is suggested also by a glimpse Frankie catches in the corner of her eye. "It was a mysterious trick of sight and the imagination...There was something sideways and behind her that flashed across the very corner edge of her left eye." (p. 69) Retracing her steps, Frankie saw down an alley "...two colored boys, one taller than the other and with his arm resting on the shorter boy's shoulder." (p. 70) And in their half-glimpsed shapes,

Frankie had a vision of her brother and his bride as they had stood by the mantle the day before, and she was flooded with love for the wedding and for the world. This incident, suggestive of a Joycean epiphany, later brought about the discussion of love. "/Love/ was a subject F. Jasmine had never talked about in all her life. In the first place, she had never believed in love and had never put it in her shows." (p. 75) Yet when Frankie told Berenice what she had seen in the alley and the sensation it aroused, Berenice unleashed her full discourse on love, and this time Frankie did not stop up her ears.

Berenice had found a perfect love in Ludie Freeman, her first husband. After his death she had tried to duplicate that love by associating the whole of it with fragments she found in others. For instance, her second husband had a thumb like Ludie's; her third wore a coat like Ludie's. The reason for the fourth marriage is not explicit, but the implication is that it was purely a carnal feast for Berenice. As Frank Baldanza points out, Berenice's "...spiritual vision is the more intense for her physical handicap"[7] (the blue glass eye). In the thematic and symbolic readings of the book, Baldanza says that "Berenice's commitment to sensual love puts her in a category of lesser beings, and the real concern for the tale is with F. Jasmine's spiritual discoveries about love and being."[8]

Frankie's early perceptions are only beginnings; she has accepted the existence of love, but before she can truly love she must know herself. Her sensitivity to her being is shown in her name changes. Unsure of her own identity, she changes it three times in the novel: the mean and selfish, confused girl is Frankie; the young lady who is part of the wedding is

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[7] Ibid., p. 158.

[8] Ibid., p. 160.

F. Jasmine; and the initiated youth who is no longer poised in the doorway is Frances. Frankie reflects on the uniqueness of each person's being:

> 'Doesn't it strike you as strange that I am I, and you are you? ...And we can look at each other, and touch each other, and stay together year in and year out in the same room. Yet always I am I, and you are you. And I can't ever be anything else but me, and you can't ever be anything else but you. Have you ever thought of that? And does it seem to you strange?' (p. 109)

Berenice agrees that it is strange, and she replies:

> 'We all of us caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow. I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry born John Henry. And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught. Me is me and you is you and he is he. We each one of us somehow caught all by ourself.' (p. 113)

Frankie replies, "Yet at the same time you almost might use the word loose instead of caught." (p. 114) She continues:

> 'But what is this all about? People loose and at the same time caught. Caught and loose. All these people and you don't know what joins them up. There's bound to be some sort of reason and connection. Yet somehow I can seem to name it. I don't know.' (p. 115)

The long August twilight enfolds the kitchen. F. Jasmine sits in Berenice's lap, her long legs swinging to the floor. John Henry hovers nearby, wearing Berenice's pink hat and high-heeled shoes. "The sounds of the summer evening were mingled and long-drawn." (p. 115) Then, Frankie ended the long afternoon's conversation:

> 'I wonder if you have ever thought about this. Here we are--right now. This very minute. Now. But while we're talking now, this minute is passing. And it will never come again. Never in all the world. When it is gone it is gone. No power on earth could bring it back again. It is gone. Have you ever thought about that?'
>
> Berenice did not answer, and the kitchen was now dark. The three of them sat silent, close together, and they could feel and hear each other's breaths. Then suddenly it started, though why and how they did not know; the three of them began to cry. (pp. 115, 116)

So ends the long day of Frankie's awakening. She is yet to meet the disaster at the wedding; John Henry is to die; Berenice will marry and leave. Frankie will find a new friend at school and move to a new house. And then--Dayton Kohler has commented that Carson McCullers' novels give "the impression of life continuing irrevocably beyond her final page."[9] A reader can assume that Berenice's fifth marriage will be a satisfactory one because she admits entering it for financial security and not for an attempt to recreate a former love. And an extension of Frankie's continuing hopes and disappointments through life is not buried under the temporary facade of happiness which ends the book.

Berenice's marriage and John Henry's death leave Frankie alone. In a symbolic reading of the novel, it is necessary that the two representatives of childhood and maturity between which the adolescent balances be removed. Berenice, as the representative of maturity, has already widened the passage for Frankie's transition in her lengthy discussions of love. As a representative of childhood, John Henry must be removed because childhood is a state to which Frankie can never return. The note of optimism sounded at the end of the novel is a new and genuine happiness for Frankie. She has a "we" connection with her new friend, and together they entertain fantastic daydreams. They are going to Europe together--just as Frankie was going on the honeymoon. The inevitability of Frankie's future disappointments is apparent, but Carson McCullers holds out her common hope for mankind--the stays against loneliness are to be found in the world, and even though they are temporary, they make life's isolation less intense, and more bearable.

Many critics consider The Ballad of the Sad Cafe the finest of Carson McCullers' novels because it contains the most direct and effective statement

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[9]Kohler, op. cit., p. 420.

of her recurring themes of love and loneliness. Dayton Kohler writes, "The Ballad of the Sad Cafe is an impressive story because it takes a long, steady look at the moral evil which is also the devouring, obsessive evil of modern society, the isolation of the loving and the lonely."[10] Frank Baldanza assesses The Ballad of the Sad Cafe in these words:

> Her latest novel, The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, culminates the trend initiated with Reflections in a Golden Eye. The number of characters is even more reduced, the tale is shorter, and the insistent push toward allegorizing fantasy is realized in a form that seems to do for Mrs. McCullers all that she means for it to do. All the distracting profusion of naturalistic observation and social inclusiveness of The Heart is a Lonely Hunter has been cut away, and every detail of the matrix of scene blends into the overall design of the meaning.[11]

The "insistent push" and "every detail of the matrix of scene" which Mr. Baldanza mentions characterize the major force of the novel. In The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, Mrs. McCullers has pushed realism to an extreme, but she has not passed the rather nebulous limit which separates realism from pure fantasy. For all their extremity, her characters are yet believable.

In explaining his theory of the grotesque, Tennessee Williams says that the awfulness of life has to be compressed in using symbols of the grotesque and violent because "a book is short and a man's life is long." (p. xiv) It is this compression of characters and action in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe which presents the author with the complex problem of how best to utilize the force of her symbols and at the same time to maintain the humanizing force of realism. Carson McCullers solves this problem by using direct narration. Dayton Kohler has criticized the intrusion and editorializing

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[10] Kohler, op. cit., p. 419.

[11] Baldanza, op. cit., p. 161.

in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, and suggests that it was necessary to support a weak story. On the contrary, I think that the natural simplicity and compassion of the narration rescue the story from pure fantasy.

Barbara Nauer Folk has described the story as being deep and earthy like a ballad, "...the piece is at one and the same time a literary ballad and a folk dirge enclosing a cosmic statement."[12] A folk narrator has control of all the facts of his tale. He can comment on the characters or action directly, and he can provide deft transition and control of all time, past, present, and future. The unifying force of the direct narrator gives greater freedom to a novelist, because he can introduce a character and write, as Mrs. McCullers once did, "So, do not forget this Marvin Macy, as he is to act a terrible part in the story which is yet to come." (p. 34) Or he can control time by writing as she did, "So for the moment regard these years from random and disjointed views," (p. 24) or "...for a moment let it rest." (p. 25)

The concentrated unity of The Ballad of the Sad Cafe, in its characterization, setting, plot, and symbols, is not solely dependent on point of view, but the compatability of the narrator to the mood and theme of the story increases its overall effect. It has been mentioned before, that for all Miss Amelia's and Lymon's grotesqueness, they are not repulsive. The narrator's attitude is a contributing factor to this circumstance. When the narrator says that not everyone in the town was vindictive in their speculations on the relationship between Amelia and Lymon, a reader instinctively knows that the narrator is among those people. He says that there were three good people in town:

> These good people judged Miss Amelia in a different way from what the others judged her. When a person is as contrary in every single respect as she was and when the

[12]Folk, op. cit., p. 203.

> sins of a person have amounted to such a point that they can hardly be remembered all at once--then this person plainly requires a special judgment. (p. 14)

At the hands of the narrator, Miss Amelia's "special judgment" is assured.

In a ballad, the myth-like characteristics of heroes are often exaggerated to underscore the moral lesson of the tale. As legendary figures in their own village, the extremes of Amelia and Lymon are emphasized, and in this way they become symbolic figures. Miss Amelia's crossed gray eyes are "turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief." (p. 4) In this gaze is mankind, regardless of his external trappings, looking at his soul. William P. Clancy describes that vision of Amelia's face as "a metaphysical fusion of horror and compassion" which serves well as the symbol of all Carson McCullers' work.[13]

The theme of Clock Without Hands is centered on man's search for Self. The search is symbolized in two characters--J. T. Malone, who seeks meaning for his life just when he is about to lose it, and Jester Clane, the adolescent who seeks meaning while he is yet on the threshold of life. A passage from Kierkegaard's Sickness Unto Death provides the stimulus for Malone's search:

> The greatest danger, that of losing one's own self, may pass off quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, that of an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc., is sure to be noticed. (p. 132)

Upon reading these lines while he was in the hospital, Malone realized "He had lost himself... he realized that surely. But how? When? ...it all happened so naturally that it seemed supernatural." (pp. 132, 133)

For months, Malone bitterly and resentfully examined his life and tried to find a solution or answer for his being. And he sought assurance for his soul. After hearing a sermon on death, Malone tried to talk with the minister concerning his fate. His questions about eternal life and how

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[13] Clancy, op. cit., p. 243.

he might best prepare for death were answered by the minister in a series of unsatisfying cliches: "We all have to die," "All Christians should prepare for death...by righteous living," and "It's not up to man's judgment to decide what is good and what is bad. God sees the truth, and is our Savior." As Malone left the minister's house, "A bright woodpecker pecked hollowly at a telephone pole," (pp. 139, 140) a significant detail which Carson McCullers adds with weighted meaning.

Malone eventually finds an act wherein he might better care for his "immortal soul." In refusing the lot which he drew to bomb Sherman Pew's home, Malone explained his imminent death to the men gathered in his drugstore. "Gentlemen, I am too near death to sin and to murder. I don't want to endanger my immortal soul." (p. 200)

The Negro boy Sherman Pew unites the two characters in their search for meaning. For Malone, he liberates him from the sin of omission which has cost him his knowledge of life. For Jester, Sherman awakens many feelings and ideas that might have lain dormant for years or been killed entirely by the suffocating love of his grandfather.

In his rage and despair over the senseless murder of his friend, Jester plans retribution for the murderer who so cheerfully admits his guilt. Jester, who was a licensed pilot, took Sammy Lank, the poor-white father of numerous sets of twins and triplets, for a ride in his plane. There he planned to kill Sammy, but during the ride Jester learned the pitiful story of the Lanks' wild dreams for quintuplets.

> The grotesque pity of the story made Jester laugh that laughter of despair. And once having laughed and despaired and pitied, he knew he could not use the pistol. For in that instant the seed of compassion, forced by sorrow, had begun to blossom. Jester slipped the pistol from his pocket and dropped it out of the plane. (p. 208)

It is then, through his "odyssey of passion, friendship, love, and revenge," that Jester achieves a full recognition of his place in the world.

His life need not be lost, and pass unnoticed. It is in the concluding pages of this novel that Carson McCullers has given an affirmation of the order and a possibility of love in the world:

> Looking downward from an altitude of two thousand feet, the world assumes order...The surrounding terrain seems designed by a law more just and mathematical than the laws of property and bigotry: a dark parallelogram of pine woods, square fields, rectangles of sward...From this height you do not see man and the details of his humiliation. The earth from a great distance is perfect and whole.
>
> But this is an order foreign to the heart, and to love the earth you must come closer. Gliding downward, low over the town and the countryside, the whole breaks into a multiplicity of impressions. The town is much the same in all its seasons, but the land changes. In early spring the fields here are like patches of worn gray corduroy, each one alike. Now you could begin to tell the crops apart: the gray-green of cotton, the dense spidery tobacco land, the burning green of corn. As you circle inward, the town itself becomes crazy and complex...You see the secret corners of all the sad back yards. Gray fences, factories, the flat main street. From the air men are shrunken and they have an automatic look, like wound-up dolls. They seem to move mechanically among haphazard miseries. You do not see their eyes. And finally this is intolerable. The whole earth from a great distance means less than one long look into a pair of human eyes. Even the eyes of the enemy. (pp. 208, 209)

In an assessment of her five novels, Carson McCullers appears to have arrived at a somewhat more positive position concerning man and his relation to others and to life. The orderliness of earth from a distance is within man's vision, but as long as he lives upon the earth, the order exceeds his grasp. Therefore, a compensation must exist, and that compensation can be found in human relationships--even relationships with the enemy. In comparing this theme with that in <u>The Ballad of the Sad Cafe</u> it differs little, except that the positive note comes within the action of the novel itself rather than in an epilogue following the actual action.

There is a general feeling of weakened narrative power in Clock Without Hands, which may be the result of several factors. One may be the emphasis on the external properties of plot and setting. Without the insular quality of a setting which unifies action and mood, the focus of the action is less direct. The internal characterization is told about more frequently than it is shown. There is also less unity and interdependence of characters.

The ending of the novel is a disappointing feature, also. In all her previous work (with the exception of Reflections in a Golden Eye which ends abruptly), Mrs. McCullers works out a careful denouement that fulfills the thematic purpose of the climax, but without in any way destroying the prevailing mood of the climax scene. In Clock Without Hands, the four final episodes focus on each of the four main characters. First, there is Sherman when his house is bombed; then Jester during his airplane ride; next, the old Judge in his tirade against school integration; and last, the death of Malone, whose last breath "sounded like a sigh." (p. 216) There is no unity in the concluding incidents as there was, for example in the final chapter of The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, where Biff attempts an explanation of the recent events, and the two other characters remaining in the novel come to the cafe. Although the airplane device itself seemed rather contrived, the thematic statement of Jester's new awareness contains the heart of the novel. Had it been ended there, perhaps the novel as a whole would have been more satisfying. As it is, it appears that the general surface-level interest of the novel has been satisfied at the expense of artistic unity.

It should be emphasized, however, that the weakness of Carson McCullers' last novel does not exclude it from the continuing pattern of progress in her work. Rather, it stands as a stronger affirmation for the hope of man

than any of the others because Jester is able to find a satisfactory meaning for his life in the external world. Characters in her earlier works find the gratifications of the external world temporary at best, and ultimately hopeless.

The variations and progression of Carson McCullers' recurring themes of love and loneliness can be traced in the symbolic plot of each novel. In The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, the ironic allegory illustrates the inadequacy of man's false gods which he constructs in his desperate search against loneliness in life. The futility of his efforts is demonstrated in Singer's relationship with Antonapoulos, in his lack of understanding of his friends' problems, and in his suicide which left them empty and lonely again. Reflections in a Golden Eye shows the failure of man's confrontations with nature in his search. The knowledge which he should have gained from nature he denies, and in his refusal to know himself honestly, he destroys nature. Mrs. McCullers' third novel combines the lyricism of the first with the unified structure of the second and in The Member of the Wedding she examines youth's first recognition of the meaning of love and being. The recognition is soon thwarted by rejection and disappointment, but a pattern of alternating hopes and frustrations is established. The temporary comforts against loneliness receives a fuller and more direct statement in The Ballad of the Sad Cafe. Here Carson McCullers continues the philosophy of impossible, unreciprocated love, but the temporary happiness it gives the lover and the necessity of human relationships tend to overshadow the pessimism implied by her philosophy of love. Thus, the note of optimism in "Twelve Mortal Men" which is carried over to Clock Without Hands. Jester Clane knows the chaos of the world, but he is able to see an eventual order which may be achieved through human relationships even if the contact is a painful one with an enemy.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The narrative power of Carson McCullers is demonstrated by her rare gift of writing novels which have appeal to both a general and a more specialized reading audience. The realistic development in plot and characterization make her novels very readable, but because of their theme of man's fundamental condition of isolation they deserve more than a cursory reading. On surface-level reading, Mrs. McCullers' characters, settings, and plots are made vivid and believable by the conventional devices of realism such as using familiar characters (although they cannot be considered ordinary characters); plain, unadorned language; careful details of familiar settings; and action which chronicles experiences in man's everyday living. What distinguishes Mrs. McCullers' work from the strictly realistic, however, are the extremes with which she works and her selections of details which are used at a symbolic level. The extremeness of her characterizations has led to a charge of "grotesqueness" in her work. By using characters such as the deaf-mute Singer who embodies the basic lack of communication between men, the giant Amelia and the dwarf Lymon to demonstrate the redeeming force of love, and feebleminded creatures such as Ellgee Williams, a compression of ideas reinforce their symbolic reference to the theme. Physical properties alone do not delineate character on either a symbolic or surface-level reading. The spiritual identity of man as he searches for meaning

in his life is developed through such devices as his responses to music, his dreams, his group associations, and his sexual identification.

Simple surface-level plots allow greater freedom to create characters and establish a setting which unifies the characters and action with the mood and atmosphere of the story. The insular quality of settings in Carson McCullers' novels demonstrate particularly well her careful craftsmanship in selection of unifying detail.

A symbolic interpretation of Mrs. McCullers' externally simple plots draws all her work together as an expression of man's search against the loneliness of his existence. In her novels, man seeks his meaning in a god-image, in nature, in love, and in society. No one of these alone is good enough, but with a genuine love and concern for humanity he will approach nearer to his goal.

Much of Carson McCullers' narrative power rests in her ability to create a plausible situation in a symbolic framework. The underlying themes of her best writing are always of foremost concern. An over-dependence on surface-level action weakens the effectiveness of her writing. Such an example of weakened power is seen in her last novel, Clock Without Hands. Although Clock Without Hands contains many characteristics of her realistic-symbolic style, its concern with external action makes it a generally less satisfying novel. Oliver Evans, in noting the difference in emphasis in Mrs. McCullers' last novel, foresees three possibilities in her future work: a completely realistic novel, a complete fantasy, or a continued combination of realism and fantasy.[1] Until future work appears, one cannot conclude that the variation in the style of her last novel represents a change in her method. But in

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[1]Evans, op. cit., p. 308.

the light of past achievement, one may hope that she will continue her style of combined realism and symbolism--a style that has produced some of the finest narratives in contemporary American fiction.

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